NOVEMBER 23rd ISSUE, 1926
VOL. LX No. 4

ADVENTURE

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Adventure

November 23rd

A Mystery Story of the Open Country

The Buckaroo of Blue Wells

A Complete Novel

By W. C. Tuttle

The Story of a Triple Meeting

Red Stripes

By Hugh Pendexter

A Tale of the Unattainable Port

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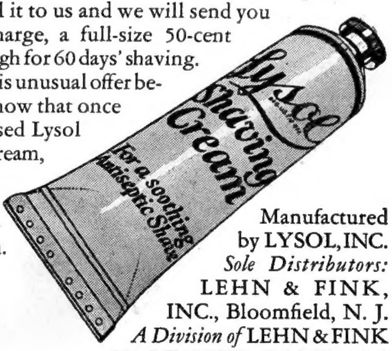
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Issue of November 23

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, *Editor*

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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Meet Hashknife *and* Sleepy *again in*

W. C. T*uttle's*

New COMPLETE NOVEL

The BUCKAROO *of*

CHAPTER I

BOOKKEEPERS

JAMES EATON LEGG hooked his heels over the rounds of his high stool, stretched wearily and looked out through the none-too-clean windows to where a heavy fog almost obscured the traffic. Heavy trucks lumbered past, grinding harshly over the cobbles. Somewhere a street-car motorman did a trap-drum effect on his gong; a ferry boat whistled boomingly. And there was the incessant roar of the every-day noises of the commercial district.

James Eaton Legg was not a prepossessing person. He was less than thirty years of age, slightly beneath medium height, slender. His face was thin, rather boyish, his mild blue eyes hidden behind a pair of glasses. His mouth was wide, and when he yawned wearily he showed a good set of teeth.

For several years James had been a bookkeeper with Mellon & Co., Wholesale Grocers, San Francisco—and he was still acting in the same capacity. His slightly stooped shoulders attested to the fact that James had bent diligently over his work. Whether fortunately, or unfortunately, James was an orphan. His mother had died while he was still very young, and when James had just finished high school, his father had gone the way of all flesh.

James was cognizant of the fact that somewhere in the world he had some relatives, but that fact caused him little concern. He remembered that his mother had a sister, who was well endowed with worldly goods, and he also remembered that his father had said that his Aunt Martha would probably die with all her wealth intact.

James turned from his contemplation of

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BLUE WELLS

the foggy street, and his blue eyes studied the occupants of the big office. There was Henry Marsh, humped like an old buzzard, his long nose close to the ledger page, as he had been the first time James had seen him. He had grown old with Mellon & Co.—so old that he worried about his job.

There were younger men, working adding machines, delving in accounts; preparing themselves for a life of drudgery. Over in the cashier's cage was David Conley, frozen-faced, pathetic; as old as Mellon & Co. James shuddered slightly. If he lived to be seventy, and worked faithfully, he might occupy that cage.

James was being paid the munificent sum of seventy dollars a month. He happened to know that David Conley drew one hundred and fifty dollars in his monthly envelope. James shook his head and shifted his gaze back to the window. He did not feel like working. It all seemed so useless; this idea of putting down figures and adding them up; eating, sleeping, and coming back to put down more figures.

He turned from contemplation of the wet street, and looked at Blair Mellon, senior member of the firm, who had come in from his private office. He was nearing seventy, thin, stooped, irascible. Nothing seemed to please him. His beady eyes shifted from one employee to another, as he walked slowly. He had made a success of business, but a wreck of himself. The boys of the firm called him "Caucus," because of the fact that once a week he would hold a caucus in the office, at which time he would impress upon them the fact that the firm was everything, and that nothing else mattered.

He would invite suggestions from department heads, and when an idea did not please him he would fly into a rage. James Eaton Legg mildly suggested at one of the caucuses that the firm supply each bookkeeper with a fountain pen, in order to economize on lost motions—and nearly lost his job. Not because of trying to increase the efficiency of the bookkeeping department, but because fountain pens cost money.

All the firm mail came to Blair Mellon's office, and it was his delight to distribute it. Just now he had several letters which he was passing out. He walked past James, stopped. James was looking at the street again. The old man scowled at the letters in his hand, one of which was addressed to James Eaton Legg. It bore the imprint of a Chicago law firm.

Blair Mellon did not believe that a bookkeeper should waste his time in looking out of the window, but just now he couldn't think of a fitting rebuke; so he placed the letter on James Legg's desk and went on.

James Legg's mild blue eyes contemplated the name of the law firm on the envelope. It all looked so very legal that James wondered what it might all mean. He drew out the enclosure and read it carefully. Then he removed his glasses, polished them carefully, and read it again. Then he propounded inelegantly, but emphatically—

"Well, I'll be ——!"

Blair Mellon had come back past the desk just in time to hear this exclamation. He stopped short and stared at James.

"Mr. Legg!" he said curtly. "You evidently forget the rule against profanity in this office."

But James Legg ignored everything, except his own thoughts.

"If that don't beat ——, what does?" he queried.

Blair Mellon stared aghast. This was downright mutiny. He struggled for the proper words with which to rebuke this young man.

"Say, Caucus," said James, giving Mellon the nickname he had never heard before, "where do they raise cattle?"

"Were you speaking to me, sir?" demanded Mellon.

James realized what he had said, and for a moment his face flushed.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Mellon."

"I should think you would, sir. Such language!"

It seemed that all work had ceased in the office. Not even a telephone bell rang.

"Have you any excuse for speaking in such a manner?" demanded the old man, conscious that every one had heard.

James Eaton Legg surveyed the room. Every eye was upon him. He noticed that even the stenographers had ceased chewing their gum. Then James Legg laughed, as he drew off his black sateen oversleeves and cast them aside. He slid off his stool, almost into the irate Mellon.

"Well, sir!" the old man's voice creaked.

"Aw, save it for somebody that's working for you," said James Legg easily. "I've quit."

"Quit?"

"Yes. Strange, isn't it?" James Legg smiled at the old man. "Bookkeepers don't usually quit, do they? No, they stick to the job until their chin hits their knees, and the undertaker has to put them in a press for two days before they'll fit a casket. I suppose the cashier will pay me off, Mr. Mellon."

"Well—er—yes, sir! It is just as well that you do quit. This is very, very unusual for an employee of Mellon and Company to—"

"To quit?" smiled James. "Sets a precedent."

"Ordinarily, we would offer a letter of recommendation, but in a case of—"

"Couldn't use it, but thank you just the same, Mr. Mellon. I am through keeping books. I'm going to take a job where I can breathe fresh air, smoke a cigaret on the job and swear when I —— please."

The old man's lean jaw set tightly for a moment, but he said icily:

"And what are you going to do, if I may ask?"

"Me?" James Legg smiled broadly around the room. "I'm going to be a cowpuncher."

"A—a—what?"

"A cowboy, if that makes it plain to you."

One of the stenographers tittered. She had her own idea of a cowboy, possibly not from the real article; so she might be forgiven for seeing humor in Legg's statement. He flushed a little, turned on his heel and went to the wash-room, every one looking after him. Blair Mellon broke the spell with—

"The incident is over, I believe, ladies and gentlemen."

Which was sufficient to put them all back to work, while James Eaton Legg accepted his pay from the stiff-faced cashier and walked out into the foggy street. He felt just a little weak over it all. It was hard to realize that he was at last without a job.

It was the first time in years that he had been without a job, and the situation rather appalled him, and he stopped on a corner, wondering whether he hadn't been just a trifle abrupt in quitting Mellon & Company.

But he realized that the die was cast; so he went to his boarding-house and to his room, where he secured an old atlas. Spreading out a map on the bed he studied the western States. Arizona seemed to appeal to him; so he ran a pencil-point along the railroad lines, wondering just where in Arizona he would care to make his start.

The pencil-point stopped at Blue Wells, and he instinctively made a circle around the name. It seemed rather isolated, and James Legg had an idea that it must be a cattle country. Something or somebody was making a noise at his door; so he got up from the bed.

He opened the door and found that the noise had been made by a dog; a rough-coated mongrel, yellowish-red, with one black eye, which gave him a devil-may-care expression. He was dirty and wet, panting from a hard run, but he sat up and squinted at James Legg, his tongue hanging out.

"Where did you come from, dog?" demanded James. "I don't think I have ever seen you before."

The dog held up one wet paw, and James shook hands with him solemnly. Came the sound of a heavy voice down-stairs, and the dog shot past James and went under the bed. The voice was audible now, and James could distinguish the high-pitched voice of the landlady, raised in protest.

"But I tell ye I seen him come in here, ma'am," declared the heavy voice. "A kind of a yaller one, he was."

"But no one in this house owns a dog," protested the landlady. "We don't allow dogs in here."

"Don't ye? And have ye the rules printed in dog language, so that the dogs would know it, ma'am? Belike he's in one of the halls, tryin' to hide."

"I'm sure you're mistaken, officer. But I'll go with you, if you care to make a search of the halls."

"I'll do that, ma'am."

James closed his door, leaving only a crack wide enough for him to see the landlady, followed by a big burly policeman, come to the head of the stairs. They came past his door, and he heard them farther down the hall. The dog was still under the bed, and as they came back James stepped into the hall.

"We are looking for a yellow dog, Mr. Legg," explained the landlady. "You haven't seen one, have you?"

"Sort of yaller and red," supplemented the officer.

James shook his head. "Must be an important yellow dog to have the police hunting for him."

"He's important to me," growled the officer. "Jist a dirty stray, so he is."

"But why are you hunting for a stray dog, officer?"

"Because he's a dangerous dog. I threw a rock at him, tryin' to chase him off me beat, and the dirty cur picked up the rock and brought it back to me."

"A retriever, eh?"

"I dunno his breed."

"But that doesn't make him dangerous."

"Then I took a kick at him and he bit me, so he did. He tore the leg of me pants and I had to go home and change. I didn't no more than get back on me beat, when there he was, probably lookin' for another chance at me legs. But I took after him and I was sure he ran in here."

"Well, I'm sure he never did," said the landlady. "But we'll look in the other halls."

James went back in the room and found the dog sitting in the middle of the floor, one ear cocked up, his brown eyes fixed on James, his tongue hanging out, as if he had heard all of the conversation and was laughing at the policeman.

James held out his hand and they shook seriously.

"Dog," said James seriously, "you did what I've often thought I'd like to do—bite a policeman. I swore out loud in Mellon and Company's office, and you bit a cop. We're a disgraceful pair. I'm wondering if you're a cattle dog—" James sighed heavily— "Well, anyway, you're as much of a cattle dog as I am a cowpuncher. Sit down and make yourself at home."

It was half an hour later that James Eaton Legg walked out of his room, carrying a heavy valise, while behind him came the dog, walking carefully, peering around the legs of his newly found master.

At the foot of the stairs they met the landlady. She stared at the dog and at James.

"That was the dog the policeman was looking for!" she exclaimed in a horrified screech. "Don't let him come toward me! You get that dog out of here, Mr. Legg! You know we don't allow dogs in here. Take him—"

"That dog," said James calmly, "is very particular who he bites, ma'am. If my bill is ready—"

"Oh, are you leaving us, Mr. Legg?"

"Yes'm, me and—er—Geronimo are leaving. If any mail comes for me, forward it to Jim Legg, Blue Wells, Arizona."

"Oh, yes. Blue Wells, Arizona. Are you going out there for your health?"

"Well," said Jim Legg, as he paid his bill, "I don't know just how it'll affect me physically. It'll probably be a good thing for Geronimo—give him a change of diet. And for the good of the police force I suppose I better phone for a taxi."

And thus did Jim Legg, erstwhile James Eaton Legg, quit his job, adopt a dog and start for Blue Wells, just an isolated spot on the map of Arizona—all in the same day.

CHAPTER II

THE PREACHER'S HORSE

IT WAS the biggest two-handed poker game ever played in Blue Wells, and when "Antelope Jim" Neal, owner of the Blue Wells Oasis Saloon, raked in the last pot, "Tex" Alden rubbed the back of his hand across his dry lips and shut his weary eyes. He had lost eight thousand dollars.

"Is that all, Tex?" asked Neal, and his voice held a hope that the big cowboy would answer in the affirmative. The game had never ceased for thirty-six hours.

"As far as I'm concerned," said Tex slowly. "I don't owe yuh anythin', do I?"

"Not a cent, Tex. Have a drink?"

"Yeah—whisky."

Tex got to his feet, stretching himself wearily. He was well over six feet tall, habitually gloomy of countenance. His hair was black, as were his jowls, even after a close shave. There were dark circles around his brown eyes, and his hand trembled as he poured out a full glass of liquor and swallowed it at a gulp.

"Here's better luck next time, Tex," said Neal.

"Throw it into yuh," said Tex shortly. "But as far as luck is concerned—"

"It did kinda break against yuh, Tex."

"Kinda, ——! Well, see yuh later."

Tex adjusted his hat and walked outside, while Neal went to his room at the back of the saloon, threw off his clothes and piled into bed. At the bar several cowboys added another drink to their already large collection and marveled at the size of Tex Alden's losses.

"'F I lost that much, I'd have a —— of a time buyin' any Christmas presents for m' friends, next December," said Johnny Grant, a diminutive cowboy from the AK ranch.

"There ain't that much money," declared "Eskimo" Swensen, two hundred pounds of authority on any subject, who also drew forty dollars per month from the AK. "It takes over sixteen years of steady work, without spendin' a cent, to make that much money. Never let anybody tell yuh that there is any eight thousand in one lump sum."

"And that statement carries my indorsement," nodded the third hired man of the AK, "Oyster" Shell, a wry-necked, buck-toothed specimen of the genus cowboy, whose boot-heels were so badly run over on the outer sides that it was difficult for him to attain his full height.

"There has been that much," argued Johnny. "I 'member one time when I had—"

"Eighty," interrupted Oyster. "Yuh got so drunk you seen a coupla extra ciphers, Johnny. I feel m'self stretchin' a point to let yuh have eighty."

"I votes for eight," declared Eskimo heavily.

"Eight thousand ain't so awful much," said "Doc" Painter, the bartender, who wore a curl on his forehead, and who was a human incense stick, reeking of violets.

Johnny looked closely at Doc, placed his Stetson on the bar and announced—

"Mister Rockerbilt will now take the stand and speak on 'Money I Have Seen.'"

"Misser Rockerbilt," Oyster bowed his head against the bar and stepped on his new hat before he could recover it.

"A-a-a-aw, ——!" snorted the bartender.

"I've seen more than eight thousand, I'll tell yuh that. I've had—"

"Now, Doc," warned Eskimo. "Seein' and havin' are two different things. We all know that yuh came from a wealthy family, who gave yuh everythin' yuh wanted, and nothin' yuh needed. But if you ever try to make us believe that you had eight thousand dollars, we'll sure as —— kick yuh out of our Sunday-school, because yuh never came by it honestly."

"Yeah, and yuh don't need to say we ain't got no Sunday-school," added Oyster hastily. "Last Sunday—"

"I heard about it."

The bartender carefully polished a glass, breathing delicately upon it the while.

"Lemme have that glass a minute," said Johnny, and the unsuspecting bartender gave it to him. Johnny selected a place on the bar-rail and proceeded to smash the glass.

"What the —— did yuh do that for?" demanded the bartender hotly.

"What for?" Johnny lifted his brows and stared at the bartender with innocent eyes.

"Yea-a-ah! Why smash that glass?"

"Well, yuh can't expect anybody to ever drink out of it, could yuh? After you yawnin' upon it thataway, Doc. I know—well I don't want to draw it."

"——, that don't hurt the glass!"

"Well, of all things!" shrilled Oyster. "As long as the glass don't get hurt, everythin' is all right. I'll betcha he's yawned upon every glass he's got. If we was ever goin' to drink in this place again, I'd argue in favor of smashin' every glass he's got on that back bar."

And the bartender knew that the AK outfit were entirely capable of doing just such a thing. But they were not quite drunk enough to accept Oyster's suggestion. At any rate their minds were diverted by the entrance of "Scotty" Olson, the big lumbering sheriff of Blue Wells, whose sense of humor was not quite as big nor as lively as a fever germ.

Scotty wore a buffalo-horn mustache, which matched the huge eyebrows that shaded his little eyes. He was a powerful person, huge of hand, heavy-voiced; rather favoring a sawed-off, double-barreled shotgun, which he handled with one hand.

"The law is among us," said Johnny seriously. "Have a little drink, Mister Law?"

"No." Scotty was without finesse.

"Have a cigar?" asked Eskimo.

"No."

"Have a chaw?" queried Oyster pleasantly.

"No. I was just talkin' with the preacher."

"Tryin' to reform yuh?" asked Johnny.

"Reform? No. He wants to know which one of you punchers tin-canned his horse?"

The three cowboys looked at each other. Their expression of amazement was rather overdone. The bartender chuckled, and Johnny turned quickly.

"What in —— is so funny about it, Doc?" he demanded. "It's no laughin' matter, I'd tell a man," he turned to the sheriff.

"You surely don't think we'd do a thing like that, Sheriff."

"I dunno," the sheriff scratched his head, tilting his hat down over one eye.

"My ——, that would be sacrilege!" exclaimed Eskimo.

"The Last Warnin'," corrected Oyster seriously, not knowing the meaning of sacrilege. The Last Warnin' was an ancient sway-backed white horse, which the minister drove to an old wobble-wheeled buggy. He had a mean eye and a propensity for digging his old hammer-shaped head into the restaurant garbage cans.

"It ain't funny," said the sheriff. "There ain't nothin' funny about tin-cannin' a horse. Louie Sing's big copper slop-can is missin', and Louie swears that he's goin' to sue the preacher. I reckon it's up to you boys to pay the preacher for his horse and Louie Sing for his copper can. The preacher says that fifty is about right for the horse, and Louie swears that he can't replace the can for less than ten."

"Well," sighed Johnny, "all I can say is that you and the preacher and the Chink are plumb loco, if you think we're goin' to pay sixty dollars for a—for somethin' we never done."

"Where'd we get sixty dollars—even if we was guilty?" wondered Oyster.

"Yuh might make it in Sunday-school," suggested the bartender.

"In Sunday-school? What do yuh mean?"

"Well," grinned Doc, "I hear that one of yuh put a four-bit piece in the collection plate and took out ninety-five cents in change."

Whether or not there was any truth in the statement, Johnny Grant took sudden exceptions to it and flung himself across the bar, pawing at the bartender, whose shoulders collided with the stacked glassware on the back bar, as he tried to escape the clawing hands.

"Stop that!" yelled the sheriff.

He rushed at Johnny, trying to save the worthy bartender from assault, but one of his big boots became entangled with the feet of Oyster Shell, and he sprawled on his face, narrowly missing the bar-rail, while into him fell Eskimo Olson, backward, of course, his spurs catching in the sheriff's vest and shirt and almost disrobing him.

With a roar of wrath the sheriff got to his feet, made an ineffectual swing at Eskimo, and ran at Oyster, who had backed to the center of the room, holding a chair in both hands. The sheriff was so wrathy that he ignored the chair, until Oyster flung it down against his shins, and the sheriff turned a complete somersault, which knocked all the breath out of him.

Johnny Grant had swung around on the bar in time to see the sheriff crash down, ignoring the perspiring bartender, who, armed with a bottle, had backed to the end of the bar. The sheriff got to his feet, one foot still fast between the rounds of the chair, and looked vacantly around. Then he grinned foolishly and headed for the front door, dragging the chair.

It tripped him as he went across the threshold and he fell on his knees outside. Then he got to his feet, tore the offending chair loose, flung it viciously out into the street, and went lurching toward his office, scratching his head, as if wondering what it was all about.

"Knocked back seven generations," whooped Eskimo, as he clung to Johnny Grant, who in turn was hugging Oyster.

"Mamma Mine, I hope t' die!" whooped Johnny. "Oh, don't show me no more! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! He never even seen that chair!"

They went into more paroxysms of mirth, while the bartender smoothed his vest, placed his bottle back behind the bar and got a broom to sweep up the broken glassware. He knew that he was forgotten for a while, at least.

CHAPTER III

OTHER PEOPLE'S MONEY

TEX ALDEN had left the Oasis and sauntered down the street to where a weathered sign proclaimed the office of Lee Barnhardt, Attorney at Law. Barnhardt was a lean, hatchet-faced, keen-eyed sort of person, possibly forty-five years of age, whose eyes were rather too close together, ears small and clinging close to his bony head, and chin was wedge-shaped. His neck was so long and thin that it was the general opinion in Blue Wells that on Sunday Barnhardt wore a cuff around his neck instead of a collar.

Tex Alden and Lee Barnhardt had considerable in common, as Tex was manager of the X Bar 6 cattle outfit, while Barnhardt was legal counsel and manager for the same outfit. Tex had always born a fairly good reputation, except that he was an inveterate gambler. People admitted that Barnhardt was shrewd, even if they did not like him.

Barnhardt was busily engaged in cleaning out his old cob pipe when Tex walked in and sat down, and like all lawyers he kept Tex waiting until the pipe was cleaned, filled and lighted. Then he turned around on his creaking swivel-chair and fixed his cold eyes upon Tex.

"Well?" he managed to say, between puffs.

"Well, ——!" snorted Tex. "I just finished losing the eight thousand dollars I got for that shipment to Frisco."

Barnhardt's eyebrows lifted slightly and he sucked heavily on his extinguished pipe, staring steadily at Tex. Then:

"You lost it all, eh? Playing poker with Neal?"

Tex nodded wearily. Barnhardt leaned back in his old chair, squinting narrowly at the ceiling.

"That's a lot of money, Tex," he said thoughtfully. "It puts you in pretty bad, don't yuh think?"

"Sure. That's why I came over here, Lee."

"Is that so? Thinking, of course, that I can square it for yuh," Barnhardt laughed wryly. "It's quite a job to explain away eight thousand dollars, Tex. I don't know why you didn't bring that check to me."

"They made it out in my name," said Tex, as if that might mitigate the fact that he had used eight thousand belonging to the X Bar 6 outfit.

"That didn't cause it to belong to you," reminded Barnhardt. "They can jail yuh for that, Tex. It's plain embezzlement. I've got to account for that eight thousand dollars."

"How soon, Lee?"

The lawyer frowned thoughtfully. He knew he could defer the accounting for a long time, but what good would that do Tex Alden, whose monthly salary was seventy-five dollars.

"Got something in sight, Tex?" he asked.

"Not yet," Tex studied the toes of his dusty boots. "But yuh never can tell what might turn up."

"I see."

Barnhardt relaxed and lighted his pipe. After a few puffs he said—

"I think the Santa Rita pay-roll comes in tonight."

"Thasso?" Tex stared at Barnhardt. "How do yuh know?"

"Chet Le Moyne rode in a while ago. He always shows up just ahead of the pay-roll and takes it back to the Santa Rita himself."

Chet Le Moyne was paymaster of the Santa Rita mine, which employed close to three hundred men. The mine was located about twelve miles from Blue Wells. Le Moyne was a handsome sort of a person, dark-haired, dark-eyed, athletic, although slender. Like Tex Alden, he was an inveterate gambler, although not inclined to plunge wildly.

"I think probably he went out to the Taylor ranch," offered Barnhardt casually. "He never does stay very long in town."

Tex scowled at his boots, and tried to make himself believe that it didn't make any difference to him if Le Moyne went out to see Marion Taylor. But down in his heart he knew it did—a lot of difference. Paul Taylor owned a small ranch about two miles south of Blue Wells, and there was no one to deny that Marion Taylor was the best-looking girl in that country.

Even Lee Barnhardt had cast covetous eyes in that direction, but Marion showed small favor to the thin-faced lawyer. In fact, she had showed little favor to any of the men, treating them all alike. Perhaps Tex and Le Moyne had been the most persistent suitors.

Old Paul Taylor, often known as "The Apostle," did not favor any certain one as a son-in-law. They were all welcome to call, as far as he was concerned. Between himself, his son, a wild-riding, hot-headed youth, known as "Buck," and one cowboy, a half-breed Navajo, known as "Peeler," they managed to eke out a living. Buck and Peeler were as wild as the ranges around Blue Wells, and The Apostle was not far behind, when it came to making the welkin ring. The Apostle was a typical old-time cattleman, who hated to see civilization crowding into the ranges.

Barnhardt studied Tex, while the big cowboy humped in a chair and studied the floor. Finally Tex lifted his head and looked at Barnhardt.

"Just why did yuh tell me about the Santa Rita pay-roll comin' in tonight, Lee?"

"No reason, Tex; just conversation, I reckon. It must run close to thirty thousand dollars. Le Moyne had one man with him. That train gets in about nine o'clock. Le Moyne probably will ride straight for the mine. That's quite a lump of money, Tex. I hear they always pay off in gold, because there's quite a lot of Mexicans working there, and they like the yellow money."

"Uh-huh," Tex's eyes narrowed as he looked at Barnhardt. "Thirty thousand is a lot of money."

"It sure is plenty," nodded Barnhardt. "More than a man could make in a lifetime out here."

Tex got to his feet and rolled a cigaret.

"Yuh can keep that eight thousand under cover a while, can'tcha, Lee?"

"For a while, Tex—sure thing."

"Thank yuh, Lee. *Adios.*"

Tex sauntered out and the lawyer looked after him, a crooked smile on his lips, feeling that he and Tex Alden understood each other perfectly. He could look from his window and see Tex get his horse at the livery-stable and ride away.

The sheriff did not go back to the Oasis Saloon that afternoon. The whole incident wasn't quite clear in his mind. He had a lump on his forehead, where he hit the floor, and one shin was skinned from the chair, but he wasn't quite sure just who was to blame for it all. Anyway, he wasn't sure that they had tin-canned the minister's horse with Louie Sing's copper can.

He wished Al Porter, his deputy, were there. Al knew how to get along with those fellows from the AK. But Al had gone to Encinas that afternoon to see his girl, and wouldn't be back until late that night, even if he were fortunate enough to catch a freight train. Encinas was twelve miles east of Blue Wells.

The election of Scotty Olson had been more or less of a joke. There had been quite a lot of mud-slinging between the Republican and Democrat candidates, and a bunch of the boys got together and induced Scotty to run independently. And while the two favorites in the race, to use a racing parlance, tried to cut each other down in the stretch, Scotty, hardly knowing what it was all about, won the election.

He had appointed Al Porter, a former deputy sheriff, to act as his deputy and mentor, and the office was really run by Al, much to the amusement of every one concerned, except Scotty, who was satisfied that he was making a big reputation for himself.

Oyster Shell, Johnny Grant and Eskimo Swensen continued to make merry at the Oasis, mostly at the expense of the bartender, who writhed under punishment but grinned in spite of it, because he owned an interest in the Oasis, with Neal, and the boys of the AK were good patrons.

It was after dark when Johnny Grant decided that it was time to go back to the ranch. He announced the fact, and his two companions suddenly found themselves of the same notion.

Out to the hitch-rack they weaved their erratic way, only to find the rack empty of horses. Johnny leaned against the end-post and rubbed his nose, while Oyster walked up and down both sides of the rack, running one hand along the top-bar.

"Nossin' here," he declared. " 'F there's a horsh at thish rack, I can't fin' him. Whatcha shay, Eskimo?"

"I shed," replied Eskimo heavily, "I shed, tha's queer."

"Isn' it queer?" asked Oyster. "I ask you open and 'bove board, ain't it queer? Whazzamatter, Johnny—gone in a tranch?"

"He's drunk," declared Eskimo, trying to slap the top-bar of the rack with his hand, and hitting his chin instead.

"And yo're cold shober," said Oyster. "Losin' a horsh makes you so mad that you bite the hitch-rack. Go ahead and gnaw it f'r me, Eskimo. Johnny, whatcha think, eh?"

"I think," said Johnny thickly, "I think it's between the sheriff and the preacher. Shomebody took our horshes."

"He's commencin' to wake up, Eskimo," said Oyster. "He's had a vision, that's what he's had. Oh my, tha' boy is clever. Let's have a vote on which one we kill firsht—sheriff or preacher."

"I vote for the sheriff," declared Eskimo. "We need lossa gospel 'round here. Let's kill the sheriff firsht. Then when the preacher preaches the funeral shervice, if he shays a good word for Scotty Olson, we'll kill the preacher and let the morals of thish here country go plumb to ——."

"Let's not kill anybody—yet," advised Johnny. "Lissen t' me, will yuh. Didja ever hear that sayin' about whom the gods would destroy, they firsht make awful mad? Didja? Well let's make Scotty Olson awful mad, eh?"

"But we ain't gods," reminded Oyster.

"Tha's a fact," admitted Johnny. "We ain't gods. But," hopefully, "mebbe we'll do until shome better ones come along."

"We're jist as good," declared Eskimo. "I'm jist as good as any I've ever sheen—prob'ly a lot better. Let's go ahead and do shomethin'. Whazza program, Johnny?"

"First," said Johnny, "we'll ask Scotty in a ladylike manner what he done with our horshes. And I don't want you pelicans to forget that you're as drunk as a pair of boiled owls. C'mon."

They weaved across the street. Johnny Grant lost his hat, and after several minutes' search, it was discovered that Eskimo was standing on it.

"Thirty dollars gone t' ——!" wailed Johnny.

"Aw, ——, it ain't hurt!" snorted Eskimo. "Jist dirty, thasall."

"After you wearin' it on one of yore big feet all over the street? My ——, I can see the moon through it."

"Wonnerful!" gasped Oyster. "I tell yuh the boy's got shecond shight. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! There ain't no moon."

They managed to reach the door of the sheriff's office. A light from the front window attested to the fact that Scotty Olson was in the office, and he answered their knock.

"What do you want?" he asked. Johnny leaned against the door-sill, his torn and dusty sombrero pulled rakishly over one eye.

"We want you to shettle a question that's been botherin' us, Scotty. C'n we come in?"

"All right," said Scotty grudgingly.

He stepped aside and the three cowboys came in. They had been in the office many times, but not in this same mood.

"My, my, thish is a nice office!" exclaimed Eskimo. "Gotta desk and a chair and a lot of outlaw's pitchers on the walls!"

"What question did you want answered?" asked Scotty nervously. He suspected them of having ulterior reasons.

"The question is thish:" said Johnny. "What did you do with our horshes?"

"A roan, a bay and a sorrel," enumerated Oyster.

The sheriff shook his head.

"I ain't seen yore —— horses."

"Jist try and remember," urged Johnny. "Try and recall the fact that you got mad at us and took 'em away."

"Aw-w-w, ——!" snorted Scotty vacantly. "I can't remember nothin' of the kind."

"I'll betcha," said Oyster seriously, "I'll betcha he's got 'em in one of his cells."

"Aw-w-w-w!" Scotty goggled at him. "That's a —— of a thing to say. Put a horse in a cell!"

"Mind if we look?" queried Johnny.

"Well, of all the drunken ideas! No, I don't care if yuh look. ——, yuh can't put a horse in a cell!"

He turned on his heel and led them to the rear of the building, where a series of three cells had been built in, leaving a corridor down the center. The doors were heavily barred and fitted with spring locks. Just now there were no occupants in the Blue Wells jail, and the doors sagged partly open. Scotty, half-angry, more than half disgusted, swung the door of the first cell wide open and stepped partly inside, turning to let the cowboys see for themselves that there were no horses in the cell, when Eskimo seemed to stumble, flung his weight against the door, which promptly snapped shut, locking the sheriff in his own cell.

"Hey! You —— fool!" yelled Scotty. "Whatcha tryin' to do, anyway?"

"Look what you done!" wailed Johnny. "You've locked the sheriff in his own jail. Now, you've done it. My, my!"

"Go and get the keys out of my desk," ordered the sheriff. "They're in the top drawer."

The three cowboys trooped obediently out through the office, extinguished the lamp, closed the door and stood on the edge of the sidewalk, chuckling with unholy glee.

"Let's see if he put our broncs in his stable," suggested Johnny. But the sheriff's stable was empty. They went to the livery-stable and found it locked.

"How about visitin' the preacher?" asked Eskimo.

"He never done it," declared Oyster. "That jigger is too timid to go near a bronc. I'll betcha that smart sheriff jist turned 'em loose on us, that's what he done. We might as well git a room at the hotel, or walk back to the ranch."

"I'll walk," said Eskimo. "I stayed one night at that old hotel and the bedbugs et holes in my boots."

"Shall we let the sheriff loose before we go?" asked Oyster.

"Let 'm alone," said Johnny. "Somebody will turn him loose after while, and I don't want to be here when they do. Eskimo, if I was you, I'd buy a bottle to take along with us. It's a long, hard walk."

"That's a pious notion," declared Eskimo, and they went weaving back toward the Oasis.

CHAPTER IV

JIMMY GETS HIS DANDER UP

JIM LEGG sprawled on a seat in the day-coach and tried to puzzle out from a time-table just when they would arrive at Blue Wells. It was a mixed train, both passenger and freight, stopping at every station along the branch line; sixty miles of starts and stops, and the highest speed would not exceed twenty miles per hour.

It had been sweltering hot, and Jim Legg's once-white collar had melted to the consistency of a dish-rag. But the shades of night had brought a cool breeze, and the gruff brakeman had assured him that the train would probably arrive on time.

Not that it made much difference to Jim Legg. He had never seen Blue Wells. To him it was merely a name. He had been forced to leave Geronimo to the tender mercies of a hard-faced express messenger, and had seen him tied to a trunk-handle in the express car.

It suddenly occurred to Jim Legg that he had made no provisions for feed and water for the dog. It did not occur to him that the messenger might be human enough to do this for the dog. The engine was whistling a station call, and Jim Legg resolved to investigate for himself.

The train clanked to a stop at the little station, and Jim Legg dropped off the steps, making his way up to the baggage car, where the messenger and a brakeman were unloading several packages. Jim noticed that the weather-beaten sign on the front of the depot showed it to be Encinas, the town where the deputy sheriff's sweetheart lived.

The brakeman went on toward the engine and Jim Legg got into the express car. Geronimo's tie-rope had been shifted to a trunk farther up the aisle, and the messenger stood just beyond him, looking over a sheaf of way-bills by the dim light of a lantern.

The train jerked ahead, but Jim Legg did not notice that they were traveling again, until the train had gained considerable speed. The messenger turned and came back toward the door, not noticing in the dim light that he had a new passenger. The dog reared up and put his paws on the messenger's overall-clad leg.

But only for a moment. The messenger whirled around and kicked the dog back against the trunk.

"Keep off me, —— yuh!" he rasped.

The dog rolled over, but came to his feet, fangs bared.

"Try to bite me, will yuh?" snarled the messenger.

He glanced around for some sort of a weapon, evidently not caring to get within kicking distance of the dog again, when Jim Legg spoke mildly—

"You really shouldn't do that."

The messenger whirled around and stared at Jim Legg. He did not recognize him as the man who had put the dog in the car at the main line.

"What in —— are you doin' in my car?" he demanded.

Jim Legg shifted uneasily.

"Well, I—I'm watching you mistreat a dumb brute, it seems. That's my dog, and I didn't put him on here to be kicked."

"Your dog, eh?"

The messenger came closer. He recognized Jim now.

"Got on at Encinas, eh?"

"I think that was the name. The train started, and I had no chance to get back to the coach, you see."

"Yeah, I see. But that don't make any difference to me. Nobody is allowed to ride in here. You'll have to get off at Blue Wells."

"Is that the next station?"

"Yeah. We'll be there in a few minutes." He looked back at the dog. "You hadn't ought to ship a dog like that. He's no —— earthly good, and he tried to bite me just now."

"You're a liar!"

It was the first time Jim Legg had ever said that to any one, and this time he had said it without a thought of the consequences. It seemed the natural thing to say.

"I'm a liar, eh?"

The messenger would weigh close to two hundred pounds and was as hard as nails.

"Yes, sir," declared Jim Legg. "If you say that Geronimo tried to bite you just now, you're a liar. I could report you for kicking that dog."

"Oh, you could, could yuh? Like ——! The company ain't responsible for dogs. You never checked him. He's just ridin' here, because I was good enough to take him in; just a —— dead-head."

"Good enough, eh?"

Jim Legg took off his glasses, put them in a case and tucked them in his pocket. The messenger came closer. The train was whistling, and they felt the slight jerk as the brakes were applied.

"I saw you kick that dog," said Jim calmly, although his heart was hammering against his ribs. "No man would do a thing like that. It was a dirty trick—and then you try to lie out of it."

"Why, you little four-eyed pup!" snorted the messenger. "I'll make you take that back. Anyway, you've got no right in this car, and I'm justified in throwin' yuh off."

Jim Legg threw out his hands in protest to any such an action. He had never fought anybody, knew nothing of self-defense. But the messenger evidently mistook Jim's attitude, and swung a right-hand smash at his head. And Jim's clumsy attempt to duck the blow caused the messenger to crash his knuckles against the top of

Jim's head. The impact of the fist sent Jim reeling back against a pile of trunks, dazed, bewildered, while the messenger, his right hand all but useless, swore vitriolically and headed for Jim again.

But the force of the blow had stirred something in the small man's brain; the fighting instinct, perhaps. And in another moment they were locked together in the center of the car. The train was lurching to a stop, but they did not know it.

The messenger's arms were locked around Jim's body, while Jim's legs were wrapped around those of the messenger, which caused them to fall heavily, struggling, making queer sounds, while Geronimo, reared the full length of his rope, made an unearthly din of barks, whines and growls, as he fought to get into the mêlée.

The train yanked ahead, going faster this time. Jim managed to get his right hand free and to get his fingers around the messenger's ear, trying ineffectually to bounce the messenger's head on the hard floor.

His efforts, while hardly successful, caused the messenger to roll over on top of Jim, who clung to the ear and managed to roll on top again. They were getting perilously near the wide door. Suddenly the messenger loosened one hand and began a series of short body punches against Jim's ribs, causing him to relax his hold on the ear. It also forced Jim to slacken his scissor hold on the messenger's legs.

Quickly the messenger doubled up his legs, forcing his knees into Jim's middle, hurling him over and sidewise. But the shift had given Jim a chance to get both arms around the messenger's neck, and when Jim swung over and felt himself dropping into space, he took the messenger right along with him.

They landed with a crash on the edge of a cut, rolled slowly through a patch of brush, and came to rest at the bottom of the cut. Fortunately Jim was uppermost at the finish. The breath had all been knocked from his body, and he was bruised from heels to hair.

He separated himself from his former antagonist, and pumped some air into his aching lungs. The train was gone. Jim looked up at the star-specked Arizona sky and wondered what it was all about. It suddenly struck him funny and he laughed, a queer little, creaky laugh. It sounded like a few notes from a wheezy old accordion he had heard a blind man playing in San Francisco. San Francisco and the Mellon Company seemed a long way off just now.

He crawled to the track level. There was no sign of the train. Everything was very still, except the dull hum of the telegraph wires along the right-of-way fence. Then the messenger began swearing, wondering aloud what was the matter. Jim Legg got to his feet and filled his lungs with the good desert air. He looked back toward the cut where he had left his opponent.

"Shut up!" he yelled. "You got whipped and that's all there is to it."

And then Jim Legg guessed which way was Blue Wells, and started limping along the track. The stopping and starting of the train between stations meant nothing to Jim Legg. He did not suspect that the first stop had been because a red lantern had been placed in the middle of the track near the Broken Cañon trestle, thereby stopping the train, and that just now three masked men were smashing through the safe, which contained the Santa Rita pay-roll. There, three men had cut the express car, forced the engineer to drive his engine to within about two miles of Blue Wells, where they stopped him, and escorted both engineer and fireman back to the express car.

The absence of the messenger bothered them, because they were afraid he had suspected a holdup and had run away, looking for help. At any rate, they went about their business in a workmanlike manner, and a few minutes after the stop they had exploded enough dynamite to force the safe to give up its golden treasure.

Quickly they removed the two canvas sacks. One of the men stepped to the doorway. Somewhere a voice was singing. The road from Blue Wells to the AK ranch paralleled the railroad at this point.

"Come on," said the man at the door.

Swiftly they dropped out of the car, leaving the engineer and fireman alone. A lantern on a trunk illuminated the car. Suddenly the engineer ran across the car and picked up the messenger's sawed-off Winchester shotgun, which had fallen behind a trunk during the fight between the messenger and Jim Legg.

He pumped in a cartridge and sprang to the door. Just out beyond the right-of-way fence he could see three shadowy figures, which were moving. Then he threw up the shotgun and the express car fairly jarred from the report of the heavy buckshot load.

The distance was great enough to give the charge of buckshot a chance to spread to a maximum degree, and none of the leaden pellets struck the mark. But just the same the three shadowy figures became prone objects.

Again came the long spurt of orange flame from the door of the express car, and more buckshot whined through the weeds.

"What kinda —— whisky was that yuh bought?" queried the voice of Johnny Grant from among the weeds.

"Well, if you think I'm goin' t' let any —— train crew heave buckshot at me, yo're crazy," declared Eskimo Swensen, and proceeded to shoot at the glow from the express car door.

"H'rah f'r us!" whooped Oyster, and unlimbered two shots from his six-shooter. His aim was a bit uncertain and it is doubtful if either bullet even hit the car.

Wham! Skee-e-e-e-e! Another handful of buckshot mowed the grass. Three six-shooters blazed back at the flash of the shotgun, and their owners shifted locations as fast as possible, because those last buckshot came too close for comfort.

Then came a lull. In fact the shooting ceased entirely. The three men in the grass saw the light go out in the car. There was no noise, except the panting of the engine, its headlight cutting a pathway of silver across the Arizona hills. Minute after minute passed. It was too dark to see an object against the car or engine, and the three men in the grass did not see the engineer and fireman crawl along to the engine and sneak into the cab.

"Where's that —— murderer with the riot-gun?" queried Eskimo Swensen. He was anxious to continue the battle.

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" cautioned Johnny. "Somebody comin'."

They could see the vague bulk of a man coming along the track. Then it passed the end of the express car, blending in with it. The three cowboys could hear the crunch of gravel, as the newcomer walked along the car, and they heard him climb inside. Came the tiny glow of a match, the snappy bark of a dog. A few moments later came the thud of two bodies hitting the gravel.

"I whipped him, Geronimo," they heard a voice say.

"My ——!" snorted Eskimo. "I thought Geronimo was dead or in jail."

Then the engine awoke and the part of a train started backing down the track, but there was no more shooting. Once away from that immediate spot the engineer put on more power, and went roaring back toward where they had cut loose from the rest of the train.

The three cowboys sat up in the grass and watched the dim figures of a man and a dog, heading toward Blue Wells, while from far down the railroad came the shrill whistle of the locomotive.

Johnny Grant got to his feet, and was joined by Eskimo and Oyster. The shooting had sobered them considerably, and when Eskimo produced the bottle Johnny shoved it aside.

"Aw, to —— with the stuff!" he said. "I've been seein' too many things already. Let's go home before we get killed for bein' on earth."

"I dunno," said Eskimo, after a deep pull at the bottle. "It seems like anythin' is liable to happen around here, but I never expected to be ambushed by a danged train."

They crawled back through the barbed-wire right-of-way fence, and headed for home, too muddled to do much wondering what it was all about.

The train passed Jim Legg before he reached Blue Wells, and he got there just after the announcement of the hold-up. A crowd had gathered at the depot, and Jim Legg heard some one saying that about thirty thousand had been stolen.

He heard some one question Chet Le Moyne, who admitted that the Santa Rita pay-roll had been on the train. Men had gone to notify the sheriff. Jim Legg did not realize that they were speaking about the train he had fell out of, even when the disheveled express messenger made his appearance. He had been picked up along the track.

The engine crew were offering all the information they had to interested listeners.

"There were three men," said the engineer.

"Three that you saw," amended the messenger, who was nursing a black eye, several facial bruises and a bad limp. "The fourth one tangled with me in the car. That's how the door happened to be open. He got on at Encinas. I ordered him off the car and he tangled with me. In the fight we both fell off. But I sure gave him enough to make him remember me."

"Was he masked?" some one asked.

"Masked? No."

"What kind of a lookin' geezer?"

"Great big son-of-a-gun. It was kinda dark in the car, and I didn't see his face very plain. I never suspected that he might be a stick-up man, or I'd have took a shot at him, but it all happened so quick that I didn't have time. He tried to pull his gun, but I blocked it, and we sure pulled some scrap."

Jim Legg kept in the background, wondering at the coincidence. Two scraps in express cars in the same evening.

"And we pretty near got 'em, even at that," said the fireman. "They jumped out of the car, leavin' me and Frank in there. Frank got the messenger's shotgun and sure sprayed 'em good and plenty.

"But they were tough eggs, and stopped to do battle. You can see where their bullets hit the car. I think we hit some of 'em. But one of their bullets split the slide jigger on the pump-gun; so we decided to quit the battle."

Two men came panting into the crowd.

"We can't find the sheriff," they announced. "His horses are gone from his stable; so he must be out of town."

"Aw, he couldn't find the hole in a doughnut, anyway," said one of the men.

"And his deputy is at Encinas," added one of the men who had gone after the sheriff. "We found that out at the Oasis."

"Anyway, there's no use chasin' hold-up men at night," said Le Moyne. "Nobody knows which way they went. They probably had their horses planted near where the safe was busted, and by now they're miles away. What I'd like to know is this: Who in —— knew that the pay-roll was comin' in tonight?"

No one seemed to know the answer. Jim Legg moved in beside a man and asked him where the hold-up had taken place.

"The train that jist came in from Encinas," said the man.

"This last one?"

"——, there's only one a day, stranger."

Jim Legg turned away, leading Geronimo on a short piece of rope, and headed up the street, looking for a hotel.

"That messenger is the first liar I ever appreciated," he told the dog. "I'm a great big son-of-a-gun, I am, and I tried to pull a gun. I'll bet Ananias turned over in his grave tonight."

They were just passing the front of Louie Sing's restaurant when a dog shot out of the alley, followed by an empty can and a volley of Chinese expletives. It was evident that a stray dog had been trying to steal something from the restaurant kitchen.

As quick as a flash Geronimo tore the rope from Jim's hand, and was hot on the trail of the departing dog. They disappeared in the dark, leaving Jim Legg staring after them. He waited for several minutes, but the dog did not appear. Then he went on to the one-story adobe hotel, where he secured a room. Afterward he went back to the street, and for the first time he realized that his valise was still on that train.

He decided to try and recover it the next day. But there was no sign of Geronimo; so Jim Legg finally went back to the hotel, hoping that the dog would return and be in evidence the next day. Jim was still a little sore from his battle in the express car, although his face and hands did not show any signs of the conflict. But he found that his body contained plenty of black-and-blue spots, and in places he had lost considerable skin.

But he ignored them, yawned widely and fairly fell into his blankets. Mellon & Company seemed a million miles away, and years and years ago.

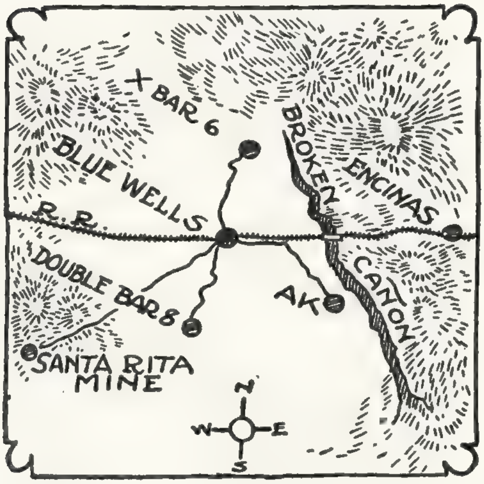
CHAPTER V

PAUL THE APOSTLE

THE Taylor ranch, by its brand name the Double Bar 8, was one of the old-time ranches. The ranch-house was a two-story adobe, closely resembling the Hopi in architecture, as the roof of the first story was used as a porch of the second. The bunk-house was one story, on the opposite side of the patio, and a semicircle adobe wall, three feet thick, extended from each end of the bunk-house, and circled the ranch-house. At the front was a huge gate, arched over with adobe, and at the two sides of the patio were entrances. In the center of the patio was an old well. The stables, sheds and corrals were at the rear of the bunk-house.

Earlier residents had planted oaks, pepper trees and flowering eucalyptus, which had grown into big trees, shading the patio, where grape-vines clambered over the old walls, tangled with the climbing roses. From afar it appeared an oasis in the gray and purple of the hills.

It was the following day after the train robbery. Marion Taylor lifted a bucket of water from the old well and poured it into a trough, while she held the lead-rope of a blue-black horse, a tall, rangy animal, a few degrees better bred than the average range animal.



The girl was bareheaded, the sleeves of her white waist rolled to her elbows. She wore a divided skirt of brown material, and a serviceable pair of tan riding-boots. Her hair was twisted in braids around her well-shaped head, and held in place with a hammered silver comb set with turquoise.

She was of average height and rather slim, with the olive tint from the desert sun. Her eyes were wide and blue, and her well-shaped lips parted in a smile, showing a flash of white teeth, when the horse snorted at the splash of water in the trough.

"Somebody must 'a' pinned yore ears back, Spike," she said softly. "Or are yuh tryin' to make me think yo're a bad horse?"

The ears of the blue-black snapped ahead, as if he understood, and he plunged his muzzle into the clear water, drinking gustily, while the girl drew another bucket and gently poured it into the trough. A burro came poking in through the patio gate, an old ancient of the Arizona hills. His right ear had been broken and looped down over his eye, and his long, scraggly gray hair carried an accumulation of almost everything that grew and wore spines.

"Hello, Apollo," called the girl. The burro lifted his one good ear, thrust out his whiskered muzzle and sniffed like a pointer dog. Then he brayed raucously, shook himself violently and came slowly up to the trough.

The horse drew aside, being either through drinking or too proud to drink with such an object. The burro looked at the horse, decided not to be particular, and proceeded to drink deeply.

Marion leaned against the curbing and laughed at the burro. That was the one reason the ancient was tolerated around the ranch—to make them laugh. His goat-like appetite was a constant provoker of profanity. Shirts, boots, straps, bedding, anything eatable or uneatable went into his maw. And as a result the inhabitants of the Double Bar 8 were careful not to leave anything lying around loose.

And Apollo was not to be tampered with. In spite of his age he was quick to resent any familiarity, and to feel the caress of his heels left nothing to be desired in the way of shocks. At one time Buck Taylor and Peeler had roped Apollo and clipped him closely, and so heavy was his coat that he almost died from chills, with the thermometer at 115 degrees in the shade.

As Marion turned away from the well and started leading the horse back toward the gate, three horsemen rode up. They were Apostle Paul, Buck and Peeler, who had left the ranch the morning previous to search for Double Bar 8 cattle, which had been reported thirty miles away on the Yellow Horn mesa.

Marion continued out of the patio and met them just outside the gate. With them was a strange dog, which came up to her, acting very friendly. It was the missing Geronimo.

"Where did you get the dog?" asked Marion, after greetings had been exchanged.

"He picked us up," smiled her father. "I dunno who owns him. There was a piece of rope draggin', and we took it off, 'cause it was always gettin' hung up on somethin'. Friendly cuss, ain't he."

Geronimo danced around, as if he knew what was being said about him. Apostle

Paul Taylor was a tall, skinny, lean-faced man, with a hooked nose, wide mouth and deep-set gray eyes. His hair was fast turning gray, and he stooped a trifle.

Buck Taylor was almost replica of his father, except that he was bow-legged, had a mop of brown hair, and did not stoop. The half-breed, Peeler, was heavy-set, deep-chested, typically Indian in features, and showing little of his white blood. The two Taylors were dressed in blue calico shirts, overalls, chaps, high-heeled boots and sombreros. The half-breed's raiment was practically the same, except that he wore a faded red shirt, scarlet muffler, and his hat-band was a riot of colored beads.

All three men wore belts and holstered guns, and in addition to this the two Taylors had rifles hung to their saddles. They were dusty, weary from their long ride. The Apostle Paul dismounted and handed his reins to Peeler.

"Did yuh find any stock on the mesa?" asked Marion.

"About thirty head," replied her father. "Wild as hawks, too. We brought 'em in as far as Buzzard Springs. Anythin' new?"

"Not a thing, Dad."

"You ain't tried ridin' Spike, have yuh?"

Marion shook her head and looked at the blue-black.

"Then yuh better let Buck or Peeler fork him first. He ain't been saddled for three months."

"Yeah, and the last time I climbed him he piled me quick," laughed Buck. "Let Peeler do it."

"After pay-day," grinned Peeler. "I don't want to die with money comin' to me."

"Pshaw, I'll ride him myself," said Marion.

Her father laughed and turned toward the gate when two men rode around from behind the bunk-house and came up to them. It was Scotty Olson, the sheriff, and Al Porter, the deputy. Porter was a big man, dark-featured, with a nose entirely too large for the rest of his face, and very flat cheekbones.

"Hyah, Sheriff," greeted Taylor.

"Howdy."

The sheriff removed his hat and bowed awkwardly to Marion—

"Howdy, Miss Taylor."

"Hello, Sheriff," replied the girl.

Olson rubbed a huge hand across his big mustaches. There was still a lump on his forehead, where he had bumped himself on the floor in the Oasis.

"Just gettin' in?" queried Porter, glancing at the horses.

Apostle Paul nodded quickly.

"Yeah. Been back on Yellow Horn mesa, lookin' for cattle."

"Way up there, eh?" said the sheriff. "Quite a ride."

"Went up yesterday," offered Buck.

"Uh-huh," the sheriff eased himself in the saddle. "Then yuh wasn't around here last night, eh?"

"Nope. Why?"

"Didn't yuh hear about the hold-up?"

"Hold-up?" Taylor shook his head. "Where?"

"Last night," said Porter, "the train was robbed between Broken Cañon and Blue Wells. They got the Santa Rita pay-roll."

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Taylor. "Anybody hurt?"

"Nope."

"They must 'a' got close to thirty thousand," said Buck.

Porter turned quickly.

"What do you know about it, Buck?"

Buck stared back at him, his eyes hardening at the implication in the deputy's question.

"I don't reckon the amount of the Santa Rita pay-roll is any secret, Porter."

"Thasso?" Porter shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, that's so," Buck dropped his reins and walked over to Porter, who squinted narrowly at him.

"I don't like the way yuh said that, Porter."

"The way I said what?" queried Porter.

"You know what I mean," declared Buck, angrily.

"Drop it, Buck," advised his father, and turned to Olson.

"How many men in the gang, Scotty?"

"Three that we know of—possibly a fourth. A man got on the express car when the train stopped at Encinas, and him and the express messenger had a fight. They fell out of the door and rolled into the ditch. It kinda looks as though this feller was one of the gang. Anyway, there was three that stopped the train, cut off the engine and express car, and blowed the safe."

"Are you just startin' out after 'em?" asked Buck, squinting at the sun. "Not very early, it seems to me."

"I didn't know nothin' about it until this mornin'," said Porter. "I came in from Encinas early this mornin' on a freight, and went to bed. I got up jist before noon, and they told me about it; so I got the sheriff and we started out."

Apostle Paul turned to the sheriff, whose ears were red.

"Where were you all this time, Scotty?"

"He was in jail," said Porter.

"In jail?"

"In my own jail," said Olson angrily. "Oyster Shell, Eskimo Swensen and Johnny Grant came over to my office last night. They were drunk, and insisted that I had stolen their horses. And they wanted to look in the cells, the —— fools! Jist because they was drunk I let 'em look, and they accidently locked me in.

"I told 'em where to find the keys, but they went on out and never came back. That's why nobody could find me last night. I never knowed there was a hold-up, until Porter showed up this noon. And somebody turned our horses loose, too. Mebbe it was that drunken bunch from the AK. Anyway, we're goin' over and tell 'em about it, yuh betcha."

Marion turned away, shaking with laughter, while her father and the other two of the Double Bar 8 choked back their laughter. They knew the gang from the AK very well indeed. But it was no laughing matter to the two officers.

"I can arrest them three drunks for interferin' with an officer," declared Olson hotly. "They interfered with the law when they locked me in. I was badly needed, I tell yuh."

"Sure yuh was," choked Buck. "If they hadn't locked yuh up you'd 'a' had all three of them robbers in jail now."

"Mebbe. Anyway, I'd have been on their trail."

"Where'd yuh git the new dog?" asked Porter.

"New dog?" queried Buck. "That one? Huh! We raised him."

"Never seen him before."

"Lotsa things you never seen before."

"Have yuh any clues?" asked Apostle Paul.

"Clues?" The sheriff wasn't sure of that word.

"Yeah—evidence that might lead yuh to the outlaws."

"We ain't had no time yet."

"Then what are yuh wastin' it around here for?" demanded Buck.

Porter glared at Buck, but did not reply. He disliked this thin-faced young man, but was just a trifle dubious about starting anything with him.

"Well, I s'pose we might as well be goin' along," said the sheriff. "Mebbe we'll swing around and look in at the AK. I've sure got a few things to say to them fellers."

"God be with yuh, brother," said Apostle Paul piously. "The AK is sure a good place to make a talk, but when the collection is taken up, you'll find small pay for yore work."

"We'll make 'em respect the law!" snapped Porter.

"Yes, you will," said Buck. "You better back yore law with an army. They may love yuh for startin' trouble with 'em, but they'll never respect yuh. My advice to you jiggers would be to let the AK alone. You'll never find out who robbed that train if yuh try to shove the law down the necks of them three."

"Well, by ——, I'm runnin' my office!" snapped Olson hotly. "No drunken puncher can lock me in my own jail and not hear about it."

"Let 'em hear about it, by all means—but in a roundabout way, Scotty. And please don't swear any more. Remember, there's ladies and gentlemen present."

"Ex-cuse me," grunted Scotty, picking up his reins. "Well, we'll be goin' along, folks. *Adios.*"

"*Adios, amigo,*" said Apostle Paul.

Porter glared at Buck, who wrinkled his nose at the big deputy, and rode away.

They watched the two riders head east across the little valley, riding side by side, as if carrying on a conversation.

"You think they ever find out who rob that train?" asked Peeler.

Buck snorted and headed for the stable.

"Find out nothin', Peeler. Them two jiggers couldn't find their own boots. I'd like to be at the AK, when they start their war-talk. That sure was funny about lockin' him in his own cell."

Peeler did not reply. He stopped at the stable door and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Buck looked at him sharply.

"Whatsa matter, Peeler?"

"I'm tryin' to think of one word, Buck."

"What kind of a word?"

Peeler smiled softly.

"I think it is 'convenient.' "

"Convenient? What for?"

"For the robbers, Buck. That he is locked in his cell."

Buck stared at Peeler for a moment. Then—

"Yea-a-a-a, that might be true. But it's nothin' to us; so we will forget it, eh?"

"I forget," smiled Peeler.

Porter was very angry when he and the sheriff rode away from the Taylor ranch, heading for the AK. He was inclined to do a lot of talking, once he was far enough away to conceal his language from the Taylor family.

"I tell yuh they know somethin', Scotty."

"Do yuh think so, Al?"

"Yo're —— right. Didn't Buck speak right up and tell how much money was in that pay-roll? And didn't he get right on the prod when I picked him up on it? Don't tell me that he don't know somethin' about it. They've been to Yaller Horn mesa, have they? That's a —— of a good excuse."

"Do yuh think that's enough evidence to arrest 'em on, Al?"

"Well, mebbe not. But it's sure as —— enough to suspect 'em on. I wouldn't trust any of 'em as far as I could throw a bull by the tail. Buck's a bad *hombre*, Scotty. The old man is pretty salty, and that —— breed fits in well with the bunch."

Scotty nodded. He was in the habit of agreeing with Porter, which saved him many an argument.

"We've got to watch 'em," continued Porter. "They're slick."

"Slick," agreed Scotty absently. "I'm jist wonderin' what to say to them slick-ears at the AK."

"Give 'em ——," advised Porter. "They shore need a good curryin', Scotty."

"I know they do, Al. But —— it, they won't listen to reason. I dunno why they locked me in that jail last night."

Porter grinned sarcastically, but sobered suddenly.

"Say, Scotty, here's somethin' to think about. They locked yuh in yore cell, and in about an hour the train was held up. Does that mean anythin' to you?"

Scotty shook his head.

"My——, yo're dense. Listen:" Porter repeated his statement. "Now do yuh get it?"

"You mean—they locked me up and robbed the train?"

"They locked yuh up—and the train was robbed, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, I know that, Al; but they was too drunk."

"Acted too drunk, yuh mean."

"Well, they acted—say, Al," the sheriff grinned slowly, "you sure can see things. I wonder if that ain't right? But it ain't enough evidence to arrest 'em on, is it?"

"Well, mebbe not enough to arrest 'em on, but it's enough for us to suspect 'em real hard, and to keep an eye on 'em, Scotty."

"Yo're sure gittin' evidence," applauded the sheriff. "Al, I'd be lost without yuh. You think faster than I do. I'd prob'ly think of these things after while, yuh see. And they prob'ly turned our broncs loose; so's we couldn't foller 'em, even if I got loose."

"I was jist goin' to mention that part of it, Scotty. Yuh see how things work out."

"Yeah. You'd make a good sheriff, Al."

"Sure. Mebby I will be. Unless somethin' happens I'll take a crack at the office next election."

"Will yuh? I dunno what I'll do. A feller gits kinda 'tached to a job like this, don'tcha know it? Yo're prob'ly a better deputy than you'd ever be a sheriff. A feller has to have certain qualifications to be a sheriff, and it ain't as easy as it looks. Buck was kinda sore at yuh, wasn't he?"

"Yeah, and he'll get smart jist once too often. One of these days I'm goin' to bend him plumb shut and rub his nose off agin' his knee. I'll jist stand so much from a *hombre* like him."

"You sure hang on to yore temper well, Al."

"Feller's got to, when he's a deputy. Yuh can't go fightin' every whippoorwill that wants a fight. It don't look well, Scotty."

The AK ranch was located well away from the hills, and about three miles southeast of Blue Wells. It was a typical Arizona ranch; the buildings were part adobe, but more elaborate and larger than those of the Double Bar 8. There was no patio to the AK, but the group of buildings were fenced in with barbed wire.

The sheriff and deputy rode in through the gate and up to the ranch-house, where they met old George Bonnette, owner of the outfit. He was a pudgy little man, almost bald, almost toothless, one cheek bulged from a huge chew of tobacco. He spat explosively and nodded to the officers. It was not often that the law came to the AK, and the old man looked at them curiously.

"Howdy, George," said the sheriff.

"'Lo, Scotty; hyah, Porter," Bonnette shifted his chew and waited for them to state their errand.

"Where's the boys?" asked Scotty, glancing around.

"Well," the old man scratched his head, "I've only got three workin' here now. T'day is pay-day."

"Meanin' that they've gone to town, eh?"

"Follerin' the natcheral inclination of cowpunchers, I'd say that's where they've gone. Whatcha want 'em fer?"

"Oh, nothin' much," Scotty sighed with evident relief. He really didn't want them very badly.

"You heard about the hold-up, didn't yuh?" asked Porter.

Bonnette hadn't. And he grew so interested in Porter's recital of it that he bit off two more chews of tobacco during the telling, which swelled his cheek until one eye was almost closed.

"Well, the dern cusses!" he said earnestly. "Thirty thousand dollars, eh. Worth takin', eh? Who wouldn't? Got anythin' to work on, Scotty?"

"Well," said Scotty darkly, "we might have more'n anybody'd think, George. Did the boys find their horses?"

"Hm-m-m-m," the old man scratched his head. "Seems to me I did hear one of 'em say they walked home, and that their horses was here when they arrived. Them broncs was raised here at the AK, and they'd head for home. I didn't pay much attention, but I did hear Eskimo say that somebody turned their broncs loose in town last night."

"I jist wondered if they got 'em," said Scotty.

Bonnette squinted at Scotty, his brows lifted inquiringly.

"Didja ride all the way out here to find that out?"

"Not exactly, George. Yuh see, them three jaspers locked me in my own jail last night. Didja know that?"

"In yore own jail? No, I didn't know it, Scotty."

"Yeah, they did, George. And I was in there when word came of the robbery, and didn't know a thing about it. They're liable for blockin' the law."

"Yeah, I s'pose they are. Huh!" Bonnette turned away, choking a trifle, and when he turned back there were tears in his eyes.

"We came down here to see about it," said Porter. "It's a —— of a note, when things like that happen, Bonnette. Them three fellers ort to be run out of the country."

"Yea-a-ah?" The old man looked narrowly at Porter. "Why don't yuh go ahead and do it, Porter. They're all of age, yuh know. And there ain't a milk drinker in the crowd; so they really wouldn't suffer if yuh took 'em away from the cows."

"Oh, they ain't so —— tough," retorted Porter. "They're not runnin' this country. They've kinda had their own way in Blue Wells for a long time, but now is the time to call a halt. We're civilized, I'll tell yuh that."

"Who do yuh mean, Porter?"

"Well, all of us—ain't we?"

"I dunno. Sometimes I wonder if we are. We ain't savages. We don't worship no idols, nor we don't eat each other. Holdin' up a train is a sign of civilization. I dunno about lockin' a sheriff in his cell. It sure as —— ain't old-fashioned, cause I never heard of it bein' done before."

"Well, I don't care a ——!" snorted the sheriff. "They done it to me, and I'm sure goin' to let 'em know that I'm sore about it."

"Yo're probably more interested in that than yuh are in findin' the men who held up the train."

"Yuh think so, do yuh?" growled Porter. "Well, I'll tell yuh we're plenty interested in that, too. C'mon, Scotty; we're jist wastin' time around here."

"You don't need to get mad at me," laughed Bonnette. "I never locked up any sheriffs."

"Well, yore men did!" snapped Scotty.

Bonnette laughed at the sheriff's red face.

"I'll prob'ly fire 'em for not havin' more respect for the law."

"Aw, c'mon," urged Porter. "T' —— with 'em; we've got work to do."

They rode away from the AK, heading back toward Blue Wells, no better off for their long ride to the AK.

"I've jist been thinkin' that folks around here don't show a —— of a lot of respect for the law," said Scotty Olson.

"Well," growled Porter, "it's up to us to make 'em. By ——, I'm all through lettin' folks make remarks to me. From now on I'm goin' to make these smart pelicans set up and salute when the law shows up."

CHAPTER VI

THE MAKING OF A COWBOY

JIM LEGG awoke to a different world from what he had ever seen. Blue Wells was so typically southwestern, being one long street of one and two story adobe houses, some of them half-adobe, half-frame. There were no sidewalks, no lawns, no shrubbery. The fronts of the buildings were unpainted, and the signs were so scoured from wind and sand that the letters were barely legible.

No one seemed to pay any attention to Jim Legg. The town was full of cattlemen, and the topic of conversation was the train robbery. Jim Legg listened to the different ideas on the subject, no two of which were alike. He realized that if he and the express messenger had not fought and fell out of the car, they would have been in the center of things.

And Jim Legg was glad the messenger had lied about the physical proportions of the man who had attacked him. Jim wondered what had become of Geronimo, but did not ask any one. And then Jim Legg ran into the three men from the AK outfit. Their pockets were lined with a month's pay, and they were happily inclined toward all humanity.

Oyster Shell, backed against the Oasis bar, was the first to see Jim Legg. His eyes opened wide and he spurred Johnny Grant on the calf of his left leg.

"My ——, Johnny," he said softly. "Do m' eyes deceive me?"

Johnny looked upon Jim Legg with much the same expression that a scientist might exhibit upon finding the fossil egg of a dinosaur.

"Welcome," said Johnny. "I welcome you to Blue Wells."

"How do you do?" smiled Jim. "Nice day, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Johnny, "We have one like this every thirty days. What grade of poison does yore stummick stand?"

Jim Legg had never drank anything more potent than a small glass of beer, but he knew that he was now in Rome, so he said:

"Oh, anything you gentlemen are drinking."

"Hooch!" exclaimed Eskimo, and the busy bartender sent the bottle spinning down the bar, followed by four glasses.

"You want a wash?" asked Johnny, meaning a glass of water or soda.

Jim Legg glanced at his hands and looked at himself in the back-bar.

"No," he said finally. "I don't think so."

The three cowpunchers exchanged quick glances. Fate had sent them something to play with. Eskimo poured out a full glass for their new playmate, who almost strangled over it. But he got it down.

"That's liquor," declared Johnny, smacking his lips.

"It's gug-good," whispered Jim Legg.

He cleared his throat and wondered at the warm glow within him.

"I'm buyin'," declared Oyster, spinning a dollar on the bar, which got them four clean glasses.

Again Jim Legg managed to swallow the liquor, but this time it did not strangle him. He laughed gleefully at nothing in particular and rested a hand on Johnny Grant's shoulder.

"My name's Legg," he told them. "Jim Legg."

"That's quite a name," agreed Johnny. "My name's Grant, this one's name is Shell, and that Jewish friend of ours there is named Swensen. We're Johnny, Oyster and Eskimo, respectably."

They all shook hands gravely.

"If the clerk will furnish us with clean glasses, I'll make a purchase," said Jim Legg solemnly.

"My ——!" exclaimed Eskimo explosively.

"Just why?" queried Jim Legg.

"I thought my belt was comin' off."

They filled their glasses and drank heartily. By this time Jim Legg seemed to be getting numb, but happily so. The world was bathed in a rosy glow, and he wanted to sing and dance.

"Jist what is yore business, Misser Legg?" asked Oyster.

"I came here," said Jim, "to be a cowpuncher."

Johnny Grant's foot slipped and he sat down heavily on the bar-rail.

"That," said Eskimo owlishly-wise, "is a ambitious thing for to become. I'll betcha yuh came to the right place, Jim."

"I—I—" Jim hesitated because his tongue did not seem to exactly function. "I picked thish place at ra-ra-random."

"That shounds like a college yell," said Oyster.

"You can't be no cowpuncher in them clothes," explained Eskimo. "Never, nossir. You look like Sunday. But in the proper clothes you'd be a dinger."

"I intend to dresh the part," said Jim thickly. "Perhaps I can secure the proper dresh here in Blue Wells."

"Oh, you can," said Johnny. "We can take you to a place where you can buy just what yuh need, pervidin' you've got the *dinero*."

"*Dinero?*"

"Money."

"I've got five hundred dollars."

"My ——!" Johnny took off his hat. "And you want to be a cowpuncher—with five hundred dollars!"

"Isn't it enough?"

"Don' nobody speak for a moment," begged Oyster. "I want to conchentrate. I'm about to go into a tranch."

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" warned Johnny. "The man is looking into the future."

"Is he a medium?" asked Jim Legg, owl-eyed, as he stared at Oyster.

"Medium ——! He's rare," chucked Eskimo.

"I shee shomethin' comin' to a man named Jim Legg," stated Oyster, his eyes closed tightly.

"Yuh see?" applauded Johnny.

"Yessir," nodded Jim. "Maybe we better let him alone, while we get me shome clothes."

"He's comin' out of it," announced Eskimo.

Oyster's face twitched convulsively and his eyes opened.

"Where is the haberdasher's?" asked Jim Legg.

The three cowboys stared owlishly at each other.

"Oh, them folks," Johnny Grant squinted thoughtfully.

"Must 'a' been that German fambly that nested in down on the forks of Rio Creek," said Eskimo. "They're gone. Let's go buy somethin' to make a real, regular cowboy out of this here, now, Jimmy Limbs."

THE sheriff and deputy came back to Blue Wells in bad humor. They stabled their horses and went to the office. Scotty Olson leaned against the doorway and looked across the street at the horses tied at the Oasis hitch-rack. The three at the far end were from the AK; a tall roan, a sorrel and a gray.

Al Porter sagged back in a chair, placed his feet on top of the desk and drew his sombrero down over his eyes.

"If I was you I'd go over to the Oasis and have a talk with them AK scoundrels," he told Scotty. "By ——, if I was sheriff of this county I'd shore impress upon 'em that this is a dignified office. I'd make it dignified, y'betcha."

Scotty turned troubled eyes upon his deputy.

"You would, like ——! You'll sag jist as quick as anybody, when it comes to trouble. All the way back from the AK you've told me what you'd do. Talk! Yeah, you can talk, Al. If talkin' was worth a ——, you'd be President of the U. S. A."

"A-a-a-a-aw, ——!" yawned Porter. "Don't try to pass the buck to me, feller. It ain't my trouble. If you want to forgive 'em for lockin' yuh in a cell—go ahead. It's none of my business, anyway. But if yuh want to know what I'd do, I'll—"

"I don't! —— it, Al, I don't care to hear what you'd do—unless yo're willin' to tell the truth."

"All right. We'll just drop the subject. But if they locked me in a—"

"They didn't! —— yuh, Al, I wish they had! I'd throw away the keys and leave yuh there until yuh quit runnin' off at the mouth. I'm more interested in that train robbery than I am in the AK cowpunchers."

"Yeah, and you stand a fine chance of catchin' 'em, Scotty. They've had a danged long start of us by this time."

"I s'pose."

Scotty leaned back against the door and studied the street. He saw Tex Alden ride in and tie his horse at the rack beside the three AK horses.

"Tex Alden jist rode in," he said indifferently.

"Thasso?" It did not seem to interest Porter.

"Probably came in to lose some more money."

"Lost eight thousand to Antelope Neal

yesterday," said Porter. "Wonder where in —— he got so much money. He don't own that X Bar 6."

"Don't he?"

"He sure as —— don't. It belongs to an Eastern outfit."

"Well, I don't care a ——," said Scotty. He had enough worries of his own to think about. He smoothed his buffalo-horn mustache and almost wished he weren't the sheriff of Blue Wells.

Tex Alden left his horse and started across the street toward a store, when Lee Barnhardt called to him from the door of his office. Tex turned and went over to the door of the lawyer's office, where Barnhardt was standing.

"I just wondered if you wasn't coming to see me, Tex," smiled Barnhardt.

The big cowboy blinked, wondering just why he should make it a point to see Barnhardt that day.

"Why, I dunno," he faltered. "Hadn't thought of it, Lee."

The lawyer motioned Tex into the office and closed the door. He sat down at his desk, filled his pipe carefully, scratched a match on the sole of his shoe, and puffed explosively. Then he sagged back in his chair and looked at Tex with an approving grin.

"I'll give you credit for a clean job, Tex," he said, lowering his voice confidentially. "A —— clean job."

"Yeah?" Tex scratched his chin. "Just what is it, Lee?"

"What is it?" The lawyer leaned forward, the smoke curling lazily from his nostrils. "Oh, now, Tex! We're friends, you know."

"All right," grinned Tex. "And what am I supposed to say?"

"It isn't what you say—it's what you do. My mouth is shut tight, except between us, Tex. And don't forget that I was the one who told you where to get it."

The big cowboy studied Lee Barnhardt, a puzzled frown between his brows.

"Go ahead and talk about it, Lee," he said.

Barnhardt's shrewd eyes appraised the foreman of the X Bar 6. He knew Tex was not a man you could scare or drive. He would have to go easy, at least until he knew just what Tex meant to do. Then—

"You owe me eight thousand dollars, Tex," he said.

"And a swell chance you've got of collectin' it."

"Oh, I dunno, Tex. Anyway, I'll be satisfied with the eight thousand. It ought to be more, but I can take the eight thousand with a clear conscience, because I'm not supposed to know where it comes from."

"Would yuh mind repeatin' that?" asked Tex evenly.

"No need of that, Tex. You know what I mean. There were two or three men with you last night. I realize that they have to get their share, but even at that—well, as I said before, I'll take the eight thousand and call it square."

Tex got to his feet and walked back to the door, where he turned and looked at Barnhardt, who had also stood up, leaning across his desk.

"I reckon you've gone loco, Lee," he said softly. "I dunno what yo're talkin' about —and I don't reckon you do either."

"The ——, I don't," rasped the lawyer. "If you think you can cut me out of that Santa Rita pay-roll, you're crazy. It was done on my information, and you'll come clean with me, or you'll find just how —— high a fee I can charge."

Tex blinked at him, a puzzled expression in his eyes. Then he turned on his heel and left the office, while Barnhardt stopped at the window and watched Tex walk slowly across the street to the Oasis, where he stopped and glanced back toward the office, before going into the saloon.

Barnhardt was mad. In fact, he was almost mad enough to go to the sheriff and tell him that Tex Alden knew that the Santa Rita pay-roll was coming in on that train. But he was not quite mad enough to do that. There would be plenty of time for that, in case Tex could not be induced to make a split.

Barnhardt put on his hat, yanked it down on his head, forcing his ears to flare out, and headed for the sheriff's office, intending to find out what the sheriff had in mind.

He was nearing the Blue Wells General Merchandise Store entrance, when four men came out. Three of them were the boys from the AK, but the fourth one was a stranger. Every article of his apparel shrieked of newness.

His sombrero was the biggest they could find in town, and was surmounted with a silver-studded band. His robin's-egg-blue shirt was of flimsy silk, his overalls new; and the creaking bat-wing chaps were hand-stamped and silver-ornamented. His thin neck was circled with a scarlet silk muffler, and his feet were encased in the highest-heeled boots in town.

Around his waist was a wide yellow cartridge belt, glistening with its load of cartridges, and the revolver holster was a sample of leather-working art. He carried a heavy Colt .45 in his hand—or rather in both hands. James Eaton Legg was in a fair way to become a cowpuncher.

Barnhardt stopped and looked at him. It did not require an expert eye to detect that all four of them were pie-eyed drunk. Barnhardt noticed that the sheriff was coming up the street from his office. The lawyer had heard about what had happened to the sheriff, and he wondered just what the sheriff would have to say to the boys from the AK.

Eskimo stepped back from Jim Legg, reared back on his heels and looked the young man over with appraising eyes.

"Jimmie," he said thickly, "yo're a cowboy. Yessir, if you ain't, I've never seen one. My ——, yuh hurt m' eyes."

"Look at 'm slaunch-wise," advised Johnny Grant. "My ——, don't never take a chance of lookin' at him square. Ain't he a work of art? Whatcha tryin' to do with that gun?"

Jim Legg was trying to see how the thing functioned, and it was fully loaded. It was the first time he had ever handled a six-shooter, and it interested him.

"Don't cock it!" choked Eskimo. "——'s delight! Yeah—that thing yuh jist pulled back! Don't touch that thing underneath it! Keep yore —— finger off it, I tell yuh! A-a-a-w, Johnny, take it away from him, can'tcha?"

"Aw, whazzamatter?" grunted Jim Legg. "I'd like to shee shomebody take it away from me."

"No-o-o-o-o!" wailed Johnny, ducking aside. "Point it in the air, you cross between a monkey and a Christmas tree!"

But Jim Legg reeled around on his high-heels, giggling drunkenly, the big gun in both hands.

"Don't do that, you —— fool!" wailed Oyster. "Aw, fer—"

Wham! The big gun spouted smoke between Johnny Grant and Eskimo, who promptly fell sidewise, and the bullet tore into the dirt almost under the feet of the sheriff, who had stopped about fifty feet away.

The recoil of the gun caused Jim Legg to turn half-way around. He staggered back on his heels, possibly more frightened than any of the rest.

"Whee-e-e-e-e!" he yelled, and his next shot missed Lee Barnhardt by a full inch.

"Yee-e-e-e-o-o-ow!" screamed Johnny Grant. "Cowboy blood! Look at the sheriff!"

Scotty Olson was galloping back toward his office, his legs working as fast as possible, his hat clutched tightly in one hand.

"Look at the lawyer!" yelled Eskimo, and they turned to see Lee Barnhardt go head first into his office door, like a frightened gopher, dodging a hawk.

But Oyster Shell was not paying any attention to the departing sheriff and lawyer. He wrenched the gun from Jim's hands and grasped Jim by the arm.

"C'mon, you —— fools!" he yelled. "The sheriff don't know it was an accident, and we don't want to lose Jimmy!"

Realizing that Oyster was right, the other two helped him rush the bewildered Jim across the street to the hitch-rack.

"Git on!" snorted Oyster, whirling his gray horse around. "Git in the saddle, Jim; I'll ride behind."

"I never rode no horsh," Jim drew back, shaking his head.

"You never shot at no sheriff before either!" snapped Eskimo.

He swung Jim Legg up bodily and fairly threw him into the saddle. Jim managed to grasp the horn in time to prevent himself from going off the other side.

The others were mounting in a whirl of dust. Jim felt Oyster swing up behind him, and then he seemed to lose all sense of direction. The gray flung down its head and went pitching down the street, trying to rid itself of the unaccustomed load, while on either side rode Eskimo and Johnny, yelling at the top of their voices.

"Pull leather, you ornyment!" yelled Johnny. "Anchor yoreself, son! You'll either be a cowpuncher or a corpse!"

After about ten or twelve lurching bucks, which did not seem to disturb Oyster to any great extent, the gray's head came up and they went out of Blue Wells, like three racers on the stretch.

Scotty Olson skidded into his office, fell over a chair, and sat there, his mouth wide open, while Al Porter ran to the door in time to see the four men cross the street. He turned back to the sheriff.

"What in —— happened, Scotty?"

Scotty got to his feet and brushed off his knees. Then he went to the corner behind his desk and picked up a double-barreled shotgun. Breaking it open to see whether it was loaded, he limped back to the doorway in time to see the three horses go pounding out of town in a flurry of dust.

"Goin' duck huntin'?" asked Porter sarcastically.

Scotty limped back and stood the gun in the corner.

"By ——, that makes me mad," he said seriously. "I seen them AK fellers up by the store; so I goes up there to have a heart-to-heart talk with 'em. But before I get there, one of 'em takes a shot at me and almost knocked a hole in my right boot. And when I turned around they took another shot at me."

"That don't sound reasonable," said Porter.

"I don't give a —— how it sounds; I was there, wasn't I?"

The shots had attracted some attention, and the sudden exit of the AK boys made things look suspicious. Scotty and Porter went up the street, where several men had gathered in front of the store, and were talking with Lee Barnhardt, who was telling them all about it.

"I tell you, it was deliberate," he said. "I saw that cowboy take aim at me. Why, I heard that bullet sing past my ear, so close that the air from it staggered me."

"Why did he shoot at you, Lee?" asked the storekeeper, Abe Moon, a tall, serious, tobacco-chewing person.

"I don't know. Why, I don't even know the man."

"I never seen him before either," declared the merchant. "He came in a while ago with Oyster, Eskimo and Johnny. They were all pretty full, I think. Anyway, they outfitted this young man with everything. Even bought a six-gun, and loaded it for him. He left his other clothes, wrapped up, in the back room."

The sheriff moved in closer.

"Wasn't it one of the AK boys that done the shootin', Lee?"

"No."

"The stranger," said one of the men. "Did yuh hear his name, Abe?"

"They introduced him to me. Said his name was Legg."

"Legg?" queried Barnhardt blankly. He shook his head slowly. "I dunno anybody by that name."

"I don't either—and he shot at me," said the sheriff.

"He's prob'ly one of them peculiar jiggers that would rather shoot strangers than acquaintances," said the merchant dryly.

"Well, he's goin' to hear from me," declared the sheriff.

"Write him a letter," grinned one of the men in the crowd.

"He was pretty drunk," offered the merchant.

"He wasn't too drunk to shoot straight," said Scotty. "I'm promisin' yuh right now that the next time that AK outfit comes to Blue Wells, I'm packin' a riot gun. Blue Wells has stood all it's ever goin' to from that layout. And," he added, "I don't care a —— who knows it."

Lee Barnhardt turned on his heel and walked back to his office. Chet Le Moyne and Dug Haley, the man who had come with Le Moyne to guard the Santa Rita pay-roll, rode in and drew up in front of the store. Haley was a heavy-set, stolid looking person, with a wispy mustache and only a faint suggestion of ever having had eyebrows.

Le Moyne smiled and spoke to the men, but Haley merely nodded.

"I wanted to see you, Scotty," said Le Moyne. "Goin' back to your office pretty soon?"

"Right away, Le Moyne."

Le Moyne nodded and rode beside the sheriff down to the office, while Haley tied his horse in front of the store, and went in to make some purchases. Le Moyne tied his horse and went into the office with the sheriff.

"What do you know, Scotty?" asked Le Moyne.

"Not very much. It kinda looks to me as though they had a big start on us, Le Moyne."

"Have you anythin' to work on?"

"I said I didn't have much," Scotty wasn't going to tell Le Moyne of his suspicions against the Taylors or the AK.

"Uh-huh," muttered Le Moyne. "Well, I just wanted to tell you that the express company will have a man on the job, and the Santa Rita company will also have an investigator. They'll be here tonight, and I want you to help 'em all you can. We're offering a thousand dollars reward, and the express company will probably offer somethin'. What was all this stuff about you bein' locked in your own jail?"

The sheriff told Le Moyne of the incident, and the handsome paymaster could not suppress a laugh.

"Go ahead and laugh," sighed the harassed sheriff. "It sounds funny."

"But why did they do it, Sheriff?"

"That's somethin' I'm goin' to try and find out."

"Meanin' what?"

"Well, it kept me from quick action on that robbery, didn't it?"

"It rather looks that way," admitted Le Moyne. "Well, I've got to be moving along. I just wanted to tell you about the detectives, and I know you'll help them all yuh can."

Le Moyne left the office and went up to the store, where he joined Haley. Tex Alden came in to purchase some tobacco. He nodded to Le Moyne, made his purchases and went out again. There had never been open enmity between them, nor had they ever been friends.

"Tex got hit pretty hard the other day," offered the storekeeper. "Yuh heard about Antelope Neal takin' eight thousand away from Tex in a two-handed poker game, didn't yuh?"

"I heard he did," nodded Le Moyne. "It sounded fishy."

"Well, it wasn't. He lost it all right. What's new on the pay-roll robbery?"

"Not a thing. The express company has a detective on the case, and we've sent for one. They might find out somethin', but I doubt it. Those men had a good start, and it's pretty hard to identify gold coin. If they're ever caught, it won't be through anything developed around here."

"What do yuh think about that feller throwin' the messenger out of the car? That sounds funny to me."

"It does sound rather queer," admitted Le Moyne. "But I guess it happened. The messenger sure looked as though he had been through a fight. And he wasn't there when the robbery took place, it seems. Anyway, the money is gone. We better get the mail, Jud, and head for the mine."

"How much was in that pay-roll?" asked the merchant.

"Thirty-one thousand and eighty dollars, all in gold. It'll make somebody happy, Abe."

"Yes—or unhappy, Chet. I don't reckon any man ever got a lot of happiness from what he stole. It's unlucky money."

CHAPTER VII

JIMMY WINS HIS SPURS

A FEW short days wrought a great change in Jim Legg. His face had received its baptism of Arizona sun, and no longer was he the pale-faced city dweller. His skin was beginning to peel, and as Johnny Grant said—

"He peels off like a package of cigaret papers."

His hands were seared from fast-traveling ropes, his silken shirt was minus half of one sleeve, and had a huge rent down the back. His ornate sombrero had fallen off in a corral, where a circling remuda had trampled it into the sand, giving it an antique air.

And out of self-defense he had quit wearing glasses. Just now he leaned against the corral fence, trying to roll a cigaret with cramped fingers. Beside him squatted Johnny Grant, his eyes fixed curiously upon this young man, whose eyes were filled with determination.

About fifty feet away from them were Oyster and Eskimo, saddling a horse. The animal was humped painfully, squirming uneasily under the pull of the cinch, but fearing to move, because a heavy bandage had been fastened across its eyes. The two cowboys were talking softly to each other.

"This has gone past the funny stage," Johnny Grant spoke to Jimmy Legg seriously. "We was jokin' when we dared yuh to ride Cowcatcher. You can't ride him. He ditched Eskimo in four jumps, and Eskimo is the best there is around here, Jimmy."

"I said I'd ride him," reminded Jimmy Legg. "I haven't quit yet, have I?"

Johnny Grant shook his head.

"That's why I hate to see yuh fork that bronc, Jimmy. I don't *sabe* yuh, kid. You ain't strong. Yore body ain't built for the shocks yuh get in this business. We was raised for this kinda stuff. You ain't no youngster. That bronc will jist about flatten yuh for life—and whatsa use?"

"Johnny, I want to be a cowboy," said

Jimmy seriously. "It's something I can't explain right now. I appreciate you trying to save me. I've been thrown five times since I came here, and I'm still able to hobble around."

"Yeah, I know. But this is a *horse*. He's plumb bad. If there's any slip in the boys bein' able to herd him away after he's spilled yuh, he might tromp yuh."

"But," Jim Legg spoke softly, "I've got confidence in Oyster and Eskimo. They'll do their part. If I can ride Cowcatcher, will you admit that I can ride?"

Johnny smiled softly.

"I'll admit that yo're the best rider in the Blue Wells country."

"All set!" called Eskimo. "Johnny, you pull the blind, after me and Oyster get all set, will yuh?"

Johnny held Cowcatcher while Jim Legg mounted. The rough-coated gray outlaw, which had defied the best riders of the Blue Wells ranges, stiffened slightly, but did not move. Oyster and Eskimo mounted and rode in on each side of him, prepared to block the bucker from heading into obstacles, and to herd him away from the rider, in case of a spill.

They did not see the sheriff, deputy and another rider swing around the corner of the corral and come toward them.

Jim Legg straightened up in his saddle, grasped the reins tightly and nodded to Johnny Grant.

Johnny reached up and grasped the bandage.

"Pull leather, Jimmy," he said softly. "Don't be ashamed to do it. It's only —— fools and contest riders that don't, when they feel themselves goin'."

But Jim Legg shut his lips tightly and looked straight ahead. He had asked to ride Cowcatcher, after every half-way bucker on the AK had thrown him, and he was going to ride him, or get thrown clean.

Then the bandage was jerked off, and Cowcatcher was moving as he caught his first flash of sunlight, but not ahead, as they expected. Veteran of many battles, he hated the horses and riders which crowded him too closely; so he had whirled free of them, catching them flat-flooted, headed the wrong way.

Although Jim Legg was not unseated, he was flung sidewise, and his right spur hooked wickedly into Cowcatcher's flank; hooked in while the outlaw was still in the air, heading for the three riders which were not over a hundred feet away, just drawing up to witness the sport.

There was no chance for Oyster and Eskimo to ride herd on Cowcatcher. The gray outlaw churned into the dust, fairly screaming with rage, head down, running like a streak, forgetting to buck, because of that spur, socked to the full limit of the rowels into his flank.

Johnny Grant ran toward the corral, trying to see through the cloud of dust. Jim Legg was still in the same position, hands flung up, as if fearful of making a mistake and pulling leather.

The sheriff's party tried to spur their horses aside, but their slow-moving mounts failed to move quickly enough.

Came the crash of impact, the scream of a horse. A man yelled. Eskimo and Oyster were riding toward them as fast as possible, while Johnny Grant ran through the dust, trying to see what had happened.

He saw one horse and rider heading toward the ranch-house, and a moment later he heard something crash into the corral fence. Two horses were down. A gust of wind blew the dust aside and he saw Scotty Olson on his hands and knees about twenty feet away from his horse, going around and around, like a pup trying to lie down.

Al Porter was flat on his back just beyond the two horses, which were trying to get up, and up by the house was the third member of the sheriff's party, trying to recover his reins, which he had dropped.

And there was Cowcatcher, standing in an angle of the corral fence, head hanging down, a most dejected-looking outlaw, while still on his back was Jimmy Legg, his hands resting on the saddle-horn, apparently oblivious to everything.

He slowly climbed down and staggered toward Johnny Grant, his lips parting in a foolish smile, as he whispered—

"My ——, wasn't that a wreck!"

Oyster and Eskimo had helped Al Porter to his feet, and he was clinging to them, puffing heavily. The sheriff managed to get up without further difficulty, and they waited for him to recover his speech. The two horses scrambled to their feet and moved toward the ranch-house, still frightened.

The sheriff was mad; so much so, in fact, that he almost yanked one side of his mustache off, trying to find words with which to express his feelings.

"Yuh know, Sheriff," said Johnny Grant, anticipating the sheriff's coming flood of profanity, "you know it was an accident."

"Yea-a-a-huh?" blurted the sheriff.

"Wh-wh-who was ridin' that —— bub-bucker?" stammered Al Porter.

Johnny looked around at Jim Legg, who was still a trifle dazed over it all. Johnny grasped him by the arm and turned to the deputy.

"This is Jimmy Legg, the only man that ever stayed on Cowcatcher."

"I don't give a ——!" roared the sheriff. "Every time I get in sight of you fellers, somethin' happens. By ——, I'm sick and tired of it! Do yuh hear me?"

"Louder and more profane," begged Eskimo, cupping one hand beside his ear.

"A-a-a-aw, shut up!" The sheriff was too mad to say anything more.

The stranger had ridden up closer to them, and was listening with an amused smile. He was a well-dressed, middle-aged sort of person, rather hard-faced.

"I got out of that pretty lucky," he said, "I happened to be just outside the crash."

"Well, I didn't," said Porter ruefully. "Any old time there's a crash—I'm in it. Boys," he turned to Johnny Grant, "this is Mr. Wade, the detective for the express company."

The boys of the AK looked Wade over critically, but the keen scrutiny of these sons of the range did not embarrass Wade. He was what is know as "hard-boiled."

"Hyah," nodded Johnny Grant. "What do yuh know?"

"Not very much," admitted Wade. "What do you know?"

"I know m' head,
I know m' feet,
I know you'll soon
Stand up to eat."

Oyster Shell chanted it softly, noticing that the detective was sitting rather sidewise in the saddle. Wade grinned widely.

"I guess that's right," he said. "I'm not used to riding."

"You workin' on that train robbery?" asked Eskimo.

"Yes, I'm supposed to be," he turned and looked at Jimmy Legg, who was still leaning against Johnny Grant. "They tell me you're a stranger around here, Mr. Legg."

"I—I've been here a while," stammered Jimmy Legg.

"Uh-huh," nodded the sheriff, breaking in on the detective. "You showed up the night of the robbery, didn't yuh?"

"He did not," said Johnny Grant quickly, "he was here the day before."

"Here at the AK?" queried Porter.

"Yeah," defiantly.

"That's funny," smiled Porter. "We just met George Bonnette in Blue Wells, and he said you came here to the ranch the day after the hold-up. And that yuh wasn't even hired yet."

"And that none of the boys knew yuh, until they met yuh that day in Blue Wells," added Scotty Olson. "Yuh bought all yore clothes there in Blue Wells, and you —— near killed me and Lee Barnhardt, because yuh acted like yuh didn't know nothin' about a six-gun. And yuh had plenty of money to buy anythin' yuh wanted."

Johnny Grant, caught in a lie, did not back up an inch. He stepped in front of Jimmy Legg and glared at the sheriff.

"Well, what if he did?" demanded Johnny.

"It's nothing to quarrel about," interposed the detective. "I merely wanted to know when, how and why he came to Blue Wells. He's a stranger around here, it seems."

"And if he is—what about it?" asked Eskimo. "There's no law against a stranger comin' here, is there?"

"Not at all," smiled the detective. "This man does not fit the description of any of the robbers, but we can't afford to miss any lead that might set us on the right track. There's a man and a dog to be accounted for.

"It seems that this man shipped his dog in the express car. We have a fairly accurate description of the dog, but not of the man. The express messenger fought with a man who got on his car at Encinas. They fell out of the car, while the train was in motion.

"This dog was on the car at that time, because the engineer and fireman saw him when the three robbers led them back to the car. The dog was there when the engineer got the messenger's shotgun and started battle with the three robbers.

"A few minutes later the engine crew sneaked back to their engine to escape the bullets of the bandits. The fireman says he thought he heard a man walk past the engine, just before they started back to pick up the rest of the train, but he is not sure. At any rate, the dog was missing when the train came to Blue Wells.

"Our theory is that the dog was merely a blind to let the man into the car at Encinas. It gave the robbers an inside man, in case the messenger might refuse to open the door. Of course they could dynamite the door, but that takes time. Perhaps the inside man did not expect the messenger to put up a battle, and that the falling out of the express car was an unexpected incident.

"The messenger states that the man tried to pull a gun, which strengthens the theory of the fourth bandit. It is just barely possible that this dog might be identified; so the owner took a chance, sneaked back to the hold-up and secured the dog. This would make it appear that they felt it necessary to have the dog in their possession. That dog was in the car when the engineer and fireman went back to the engine. When the train arrived at Blue Wells, the dog was gone."

"Which don't prove anythin'," said Johnny Grant. "When the train was robbed there were three masked men on the car, and when the train got to Blue Wells there wasn't a —— masked man on it."

The detective laughed.

"That's true. But it doesn't explain when and how Mr. Legg came to Blue Wells."

"I walked," declared Jimmy Legg bravely. "The train passed me."

"Where?" asked the sheriff.

"I don't know. It was dark, and I'm not familiar with this country. I got a room at a hotel that night."

"When did you hear that there had been a hold-up?"

"I heard them talking about it the next day," said Jimmy Legg truthfully.

He did not think it necessary to tell them he had also heard it the night before.

"I don't think he knows anything about it," said the sheriff. "He don't fit the description of any one of the robbers, and it's a cinch he ain't the big geezer that fought the messenger."

"What kind of a dog was it?" asked Oyster.

"No special breed," replied the detective. "It was of medium size, yellowish-red, and had one black eye. At least that's the description which was given to me."

A few minutes later the three officers rode away, and the cowboys turned their attention to Cowcatcher, the gray outlaw, which was still beside the corral fence. The collision with the other two horses had wrenched its right shoulder, which accounted for its not going any farther.

They took off the saddle and turned it loose. The boys were loud in their praise of Jimmy's ability as a rider. The marvel of it all was the fact that Jim had stayed with the horse.

"If he knowed anythin' about ridin', he'd 'a' been killed," Eskimo told Johnny a few minutes later, after Jim had gone into the bunk-house. "He had the luck of a drunk. I'm glad it happened thataway, instead of havin' to pick him up on a shovel."

"Sure," grinned Johnny, and then confidentially. "Eskimo, I don't *sabe* that feller. Remember when them fellers were shootin' at us from the express car? Remember the feller we seen, who comes along the track and gets into the car?"

"Yeah, I remember, Johnny. But I was too drunk to remember much more than that."

"I wasn't as sober as a judge myself, Eskimo. But I'll be danged if it was a big man. Do yuh remember somethin' about somebody named Geronimo?"

"That's right, Johnny! I wonder if it was the man's name, or the dog's."

"And that man headed for Blue Wells, Eskimo."

Eskimo nodded seriously.

"That's right. By golly, don'tcha know," Eskimo scratched his head thoughtfully, "I'm wonderin' what our little friend knows about that hold-up."

"And why he wants to be a cowboy. Anyway," Johnny grinned widely, "I'm for him. He's got guts. If the Old Man will hire him, we'll make a puncher out of him."

Jimmy Legg was thanking his stars that Geronimo had deserted him. He was stiff and sore from his efforts to learn the cattle business all in a few days, and he did not realize that the boys had been trying to make him quit. He had been thrown from bucking horses, until it seemed to him that ranch life consisted of dull thuds.

Because he could not rope from a horse the boys had let him work from the ground during a day's calf-branding, and his hands were seared so badly he could hardly shut them. He had managed to make enough good casts to encourage him, and he had spent hours alone in the corral, throwing loops at a snubbing post.

But his unfailing good-humor and earnest endeavor had caused the boys to go easier than they would have had he not been so foolishly innocent. George Bonnette had watched him, but said nothing. He was not running a school for making cowpunchers, but decided that Jimmy Legg was earning his board and keep.

Jimmy had decided to ride to Blue Wells that afternoon, but after a nap, which left him stiff and sore, he decided to saddle a horse and go for a ride into the hills. The other boys had ridden away before Jimmy awoke; so he saddled the horse alone for the first time. It was a fairly well broken roan mare, and he had little difficulty. He buckled on his gun and rode away.

Although the hills were fairly open, Jimmy watched his landmarks carefully. He realized that the hills and dales looked pretty much alike, and it might be difficult for him to hit a straight line back to the ranch.

A coyote crossed in front of him, stopped long enough to get a good look, and went on. Jimmy did not realize that it was a wild animal. A flock of blue quail whirred up in front of the horse and went careening down across a brushy draw. Something told him that these were game birds, and he wondered whether they were prairie chickens. He had heard of them.

He wasted several cigaret-papers, trying to master the art of rolling a cigaret on a moving horse. He did not in the least resemble the James Eaton Legg, who had slid off his high stool in Mellon & Company's office a short time before. His face was just as thin, but there was none of the office pallor. He was, as Eskimo declared, "burnt to a darned cinder."

His hands were red, his lower lip cracked. And he had quit wearing glasses. It seemed to him that they were too indelibly stamped with his former occupation. He squinted badly in the bright sun, but his vision was all right. His ornate cowboy garb was no longer ornate, and to the casual eye he would have appeared about the same as the rest of the range riders.

And, to his great delight, he was picking up a smattering of range lingo, a few well-chosen cuss words, and he could draw his six-shooter out of the holster without shooting it accidentally. He had realized later how close he had been to killing two men, and had promised himself that when he went to town with the boys he would leave his gun at the ranch.

He rode into a well defined cattle-trail and managed to light his cigaret. Since leaving the ranch he had ridden at a walk, but now he spurred his horse into a gallop. It gave him a thrill to ride alone; to know that critical eyes were not watching his riding ability. The mare was willing to run, but he curbed her slightly. He tried to remember a song that Eskimo sang, but the words escaped him.

In his reckless abandon he stood up in his stirrups, as he had seen Johnny Grant do many times, whipped off his sombrero and slapped the mare across the rump.

The next thing he realized was that the mare's ears had disappeared with a terrible lurch, and that he was again flying through space. He struck sitting down in the sand, and skidded along for several feet before stopping. He was badly jarred, but unhurt. His sombrero sailed into the brush, and the mare kept right on going for a hundred feet or so, where she whirled around, cut across a little ridge and went back toward the AK.

"That was an awful fool thing to do."

The voice seemed to come from nowhere. Jimmy Legg stretched his neck and looked around. Standing in the trail, just a few feet beyond him was a girl—Marion Taylor. Jimmy Legg shut one eye and considered her gravely. He was sure he was mistaken, and wondered whether this could be a mirage. Oyster had told him of many mirages in that country, but he had never mentioned one of a pretty girl, who could talk.

"What was a fool thing?" asked Jimmy.

"Slappin' a horse, and gettin' throwed off," she replied.

Jimmy got to his feet, braced his legs and stared at her.

"I dunno just what did happen," he confessed foolishly.

Marion eyed him gravely, and he thought she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

"You must be the new man at the AK," she said.

"Yes ma'am, I'm the new cowpuncher."

"Cowpuncher?"

"Well, yea-a-ah," he tried to imitate Johnny Grant.

The girl laughed.

"I'm James Eat—Jimmy Legg," he stammered.

"I am Marion Taylor," she said, smiling. "We own the Double Bar 8."

"Oh, yes."

They considered each other silently for a while. Jimmy glanced around.

"Where's your horse, Miss Taylor?"

She colored slightly.

"Got away from me. Spike hates snakes, you see. We found a big rattler, and I got off to shoot it. I didn't want to shoot off Spike, because he hates a gun; so I got off, and when I shot the rattler, Spike yanked away."

Jimmy nodded.

"We've both lost our horses, it seems. You see, I don't know anything about snakes."

"No? You know a rattler when you see one, don't you?"

"No, I'm sure I wouldn't."

"Then you better walk carefully, because we've got plenty of them around here. You'll probably see one on your way back to the AK."

"Possibly," said Jimmy gravely. "But I'm not going back—not now. You see, I'm going to take you home first."

"Oh, no," Marion smiled shortly. "It's only about three miles, you see. I don't mind the walk."

"Well, I'm goin' along," declared Jimmy. "You might get bit by a snake, or—or—"

Marion smiled with amusement.

"Do you think you could protect me from a rattler, Mr. Legg?"

"I dunno," confessed Jimmy.

He glanced at the Colt, which swung from her hip.

"Can you hit anything with that?"

"Sometimes. Why?"

"I was just wondering."

"Can you shoot?" she asked.

"Yea-a-a-ah, sure," solemnly. Then he laughed outright. "I almost killed the sheriff and a prominent attorney, I believe. It—it went off when I wasn't looking, you see."

"I heard about it."

They both laughed.

"Why not walk to the AK?" asked Marion. "It's a lot nearer than the Double Bar 8. We—I could get a horse there."

Jimmy shook his head quickly.

"Everybody is away, and the only horse there is one they call Cowcatcher."

"Cowcatcher!" exclaimed Marion. "I'm sure I don't want to ride him."

"You couldn't, anyway. I rode him today, and he ran rather wild, it seems. We knocked the horses from under the sheriff and the deputy, and ran into the corral fence, where Cowcatcher hurt his shoulder."

Marion looked at him in amazement. She knew the reputation of that outlaw bucker.

"Do you mean to say that you rode Cowcatcher?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And were you on him when he quit?"

"Oh, yes," innocently. "He's not very tame, is he?" Jimmy laughed softly. "It was lots of fun."

"Lots of fun?" Marion bit her lip and stared at this strange young man, whose language and actions did not brand him as a man of the ranges, and yet who had ridden the worst horse in the Blue Wells country, and thought it lots of fun.

And yet she had seen him thrown clean at the first pitching buck of a galloping horse. She could see that he had been freshly sunburned, and that his clothes were comparatively new.

"I don't understand you," she told him.

Jimmy looked away, his eyes squinted seriously.

"Do you always have to understand any one?" he asked.

"You're not a cowpuncher, Mr. Legg."

Jimmy turned to her, a half-smile on his wide mouth.

"Do I look as raw as all that, Miss Taylor? I know I'm not a cowboy, but I'm going to be. Johnny Grant says I'll make a good one, if I live to finish my education."

Marion laughed at his naive confession.

"I didn't know that anybody ever wanted to be a cowboy," she said. "It's just hard work."

Jimmy Legg looked at her, a curious expression in his eyes.

"And romance," he said slowly. "It is a big world out here. The blue nights, the sweet air of the hills in the morning, the midday, when the air fairly hums with the heat; and then when the shadows of sunset come, and the birds call—isn't it worth learning to be a cowboy, to live here?"

"Well, when you see things that way, Mr. Legg. I've lived here almost all my life, and I—maybe I'm so used to it."

"Having cowboys thrown off at your feet?" grinned Jimmy.

Marion flushed slightly.

"No, this is the first time. But you see, you are not a regular cowpuncher."

"I suppose that does make a difference. Perhaps we better start walking, Miss Taylor."

"Well, if you insist. I can let you have a horse to ride back to the AK."

"That will be fine. We should be at your ranch in an hour."

"But we won't," laughed Marion. "Any time you walk three miles an hour through this sand, the State of Arizona will give you a medal for bravery. In about fifteen minutes you'll decide that high-heeled boots were never made for walking."

It did not take Jimmy Legg that long to find it out. His left boot rubbed a blister on his heel, and his right boot creased deeply across his toes, adding several more blisters to his grand total. But he gritted his teeth and said nothing.

"Next time I go riding alone," panted Jimmy, "I'm going to tie the lead-rope around my waist. Then, if my horse throws me off and tries to go home, he'll have to drag me along."

"You've got silk socks on, haven't you?" asked Marion. Jimmy admitted that he had.

"No good," said Marion. "Stylish, but terrible. Wear woolen socks."

"You make me ashamed," confessed Jimmy. "You travel along as though it was nothing, while I'm having an awful time. All I need is a handful of lead-pencils and I'd be a first-class cripple."

The last mile was exquisite torture, but Jimmy managed to stumble into the patio of the Double Bar 8 and sit down on the well-curb.

He took off his boots, while Marion drew a fresh bucket of water. His feet were so swollen that he could hardly get the boots off, and his silk socks were in shreds.

He sat on the edge of the curb and soaked his feet in the cold water of the trough, while Marion found him a pair of Buck's socks.

"Do you still think there is romance?" she asked, as he grimaced over his blisters. He looked up at her, forgetting the pain in his feet.

"Yes," he said honestly. "You are the Beautiful Lady, and I am the Knight of the Blistered Feet." He laughed softly. "As soon as I can get my boots on, I shall try and slay a dragon for you."

"It isn't going to be a hard season on dragons," smiled the girl. "Unless all signs fail, you are going to have a hard time getting those boots on."

There was no one else at the ranch. A mocking-bird sang from the patio wall, and a huge pepper tree threw a shade across the two at the well.

"Let's forget about blistered feet," said Jimmy Legg. "Tell me about this country, Miss Taylor. I'm a tenderfoot—and, oh so tender just now," he laughed ruefully. "But I don't mind. I didn't know there were girls like you in this country. I've read stories of Arizona, where the handsome hero fought forty men, and won the heroine, who was very beautiful. But it doesn't seem true to me, because I haven't seen forty men since I came."

"And there are no beautiful heroines," she said.

"Well," smiled Jimmy, "they didn't have to do any heroic things. They were merely the central figure—some one to do great things for, don't you see."

"I suppose so," smiled the girl. "But forty Arizona men would be rather a handful for one man to whip."

Jimmy nodded seriously.

"Yes, I suppose a man would have to have quite an incentive."

"He might start in on one and work his way up," said a strange voice.

They turned quickly to see Tex Alden, who had come in so softly that they did not hear him. Perhaps they were too engrossed in their own conversation to hear him.

Tex smiled at Marion, but the look he gave Jimmy was anything but friendly.

"Hello Tex," said Marion. "We didn't hear you ride up."

"Naturally."

Marion ignored his sarcasm.

"Tex Alden, this is Mr. Legg," she said.

"From the AK," supplemented Jimmy.

"Runnin' a dude ranch out there, are they?" Tex did not offer his hand to Jimmy, who did not offer his.

Marion explained how she had lost her horse, and of how she and Jimmy had met in the hills. But Tex could not see any humor in the situation. It was too much of a coincidence to suit him.

"Outside of that," he said dryly, "I've got some bad news for you, Marion. Your father, Buck and Peeler are in jail at Blue Wells."

"In jail?" Marion stared at Tex. "Why, what for, Tex?"

Tex shrugged his shoulders.

"Robbin' that train, it seems."

"But they never robbed that train, Tex!"

"*Quien sabe.* They're in jail. Between the sheriff and that railroad detective they cooked up some sort of a case against 'em. I didn't get all of it, but it seems that Olson, Porter and the detective, a man named Wade, came out here to the ranch. During the conversation the detective kicked the dog. Buck bawled him out for it, and the detective asked Buck if it was his dog.

"Buck said it was, it seems. The sheriff asked Buck how long he had owned the dog, and Buck said he raised it. They've got the dog in jail, too, holding him until they can get the engineer, fireman and the express messenger here to identify it. From what I can hear, the dog belonged to the bandits."

Jimmy Legg stared across the patio, his eyes smarting in the bright sunlight.

"Buck never raised that dog," said Marion hoarsely. "It was a dog that picked up with them—with dad, Buck and Peeler."

"How long ago?" asked Tex.

"The—" Marion faltered. "It was the day after the robbery that he came here with them, Tex. They had been back on Yellow Horn mesa, looking for cattle. They left the day of the robbery."

"What kind of a dog was it?" asked Jimmy Legg.

"Just a stray mongrel," said Marion. "It was coarse-haired and sort of a yellowish-red color."

There was no question in Jimmy's mind that this dog was Geronimo.

"Quite a lot of strays comin' to this country lately," said Tex Alden, as he looked meaningly at Jimmy.

Jimmy caught the implication, but said nothing. He did not want to have any trouble with Tex Alden.

"I suppose yore father can prove that the dog don't belong here, can't he?" asked Tex.

"I don't see why not," replied Marion quickly.

"I was just wonderin', Marion. There's so many dogs around here that nobody pays much attention to 'em. Anyway, the sheriff says that even if they can prove away the dog, they'll have to show him where they were the night of the robbery."

"But they can't—except their word, Tex. They were back on Yellow Horn mesa, and no one saw them back there."

Tex smiled.

"Makes it kinda tough. If yo're aimin' to ride to Blue Wells, I'll ride back with yuh."

Marion looked at Jimmy, who was sitting on the edge of the curb, his sore feet encased in a pair of Buck's woolen socks.

"I suppose I'll have to go," she said slowly. "But I don't like to leave the ranch alone. If Mr. Legg will stay here until I get back—"

"That won't hardly do," said Tex quickly. "You don't know this man, Marion. We can get some one in Blue Wells—"

"Oh, I don't mind staying," said Jimmy earnestly.

"But you can't stay here with a strange man."

"I meant—until I got back," said Marion coldly. "And how long since you started running the Double Bar 8, Tex Alden?"

Tex flushed hotly.

"I'm not tryin' to run the ranch, Marion."

"Then don't. I think Spike is around by the corral; so if you will excuse me, I'll get him."

Tex made no effort to get the horse for her, because he wanted a word in private with Jimmy Legg. After she had gone out through the patio gate, Tex turned to Jimmy.

"Let me give you a word of advice, young feller. Yo're new to this country; so jist take my word for it that we don't want strangers around. You tramped in here; now tramp out. The climate of the Blue Wells country is sure damp for yore kind."

"I don't think I understand what you mean," said Jimmy. "I'm not a tramp, Mr. Alden."

"You walked into Blue Wells. Anyway, you told the sheriff yuh did. Ain't that trampin'?"

Jimmy smiled and shook his head.

"There's a difference, I think, between a man who merely walks in, and a man who tramps in."

"Not a —— bit of difference around here, Legg. I'll probably ride back with Miss Taylor; and I don't want to find you here.

If yo're wise, you'll heed what I'm tellin' yuh. I've give yuh a fair warnin'."

"Reminds me of what Miss Taylor said about rattlesnakes," said Jimmy innocently. "They nearly always buzz before they strike, it seems. She says that is what makes them less to be feared than any other poisonous snakes."

Tex stepped in closer to Jimmy, his eyes snapping.

"Do you mean to call me a snake?"

"No; only the warning. And don't forget, you called me a tramp."

"If you wasn't such an ignorant —— fool," began Tex—but at that moment Marion made her appearance leading the blue-black horse which had left her stranded in the hills, and Tex turned to her, leaving his statement to Jimmy unfinished.

"Mr. Legg won't be able to stay," stated Tex. "If you'll show him which horse to ride back to the AK, Marion—"

"I've changed my mind," said Jimmy, hugging his knees. "I'm going to stay, Miss Taylor."

"Thank you, Mr. Legg."

Marion turned away to hide a smile. She realized that Tex had tried to make Jimmy's decision for him, and she was glad that Jimmy defied him.

Tex glared at Jimmy, but said nothing. Marion waved at Jimmy from the patio gate, but Tex did not turn his head. Marion had little to say to Tex on the way to Blue Wells. He tried to apologize to her for what he had said to Jimmy Legg, but she paid little attention to his excuses. As a result, Tex rode to Blue Wells with a distinct peeve against this stranger.

He left Marion at the doorway of the sheriff's office, and met Lee Barnhardt a little farther up the street. The lawyer might have ignored Tex's presence had not Tex stepped in beside him. It was the first time they had met since the day after the hold-up.

"What do yuh know about the arrest of Taylor, Buck and the half-breed?" asked Tex. Barnhardt glanced sidewise at Tex, and a knowing smile twisted his lips.

"I know it's probably lucky for some folks, Tex. You see, I've talked with them, and I'll probably defend their case; so I haven't any information to give out."

"Yea-a-ah?"

"Yea-a-ah," Barnhardt mimicked Tex's drawl perfectly, but the expression in Tex's eyes caused Barnhardt's Adam's-apple to jerk convulsively. The lawyer was a physical coward, and Tex knew it; so he grasped Barnhardt by the sleeve, whirled him around and slammed his back against the front of the office.

"—— you!" gritted Tex. "I've stood about all I'm goin' to stand from you, Lee. Yo're as crooked as a snake in a cactus patch, and we both know it. You told me about that Santa Rita pay-roll, because you wanted yore share. Now, —— yuh—get it, if yuh can!"

Tex stepped back, his eyes narrowed dangerously, as he looked at Barnhardt's thin face, which twisted to a sneering grin, when he felt sure that Tex was not going to do him bodily harm.

"All right, Tex," he said hoarsely. "No bad feelings, I hope."

Tex shook his head slowly.

"I don't *sabe* you, Lee," he said softly. "Mebbe some day I'm goin' to have to kill you."

Tex spoke in a matter-of-fact way, as though the killing of Lee Barnhardt would be merely a disagreeable task. Barnhardt smiled crookedly.

"You don't need to threaten me, Tex," he said.

"Oh, that's not a threat."

Barnhardt straightened his collar.

"You called me a crook," he remarked. "You can't prove anything, Tex; but you embezzled eight thousand dollars—and I can prove it."

"How can yuh? You haven't the bill of sale, nor a copy of it. You had nothing to do with the sale. The check was made out to me."

"All right," Barnhardt laughed shortly. "In two weeks the Fall roundup will be held, Tex. There's going to be a shortage of X Bar 6 stock to account for. My report will show this, and I'll have to explain just what happened—unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you shoot square with me, Tex."

"In other words," said Tex coldly, "if I'll play a crooked game with you, you'll protect me, eh?"

"You don't need to be so —— virtuous!" snapped Barnhardt. "You're in pretty deep already. And any time I want to, I can cut you loose from your present job. Don't forget that I can do you a lot of harm, if I want to, Tex. One of these days that X Bar 6 is going to be mine."

"Yea-a-ah? How do yuh figure that, Lee?"

"That's my business. You think things over, Tex."

Tex nodded shortly.

"All right. What kind of a case have they got against Taylor?"

"I don't know. That Wade, the railroad detective, seems to think the dog links 'em pretty close to the case, but he's got to wait until the engine crew and the messenger identify the dog as being the one that was on the express car."

"Marion says it's a dog that picked up with them the day after the hold up. I don't remember any such a dog around the Double Bar 8."

"Well, you don't need to worry about it, do you?"

"Why not? I expect to marry Taylor's daughter."

"Well? She's not under arrest. You better look out for Le Moyne, Tex. He's got the same ideas that you have, and I understand that Apostle Paul thinks a lot of Le Moyne."

"Le Moyne don't interest me, Lee."

"Sure he don't. But he don't have to interest you. Le Moyne is a handsome devil, and if I was in your boots—"

"Well, you're not!" Tex flushed angrily. "I've got to help Marion find some woman to stay at the ranch with her. She can't stay there alone. That —— tenderfoot from the AK was there when I left. His horse pitched him off in the hills, and he wore his feet out walkin' to the Double Bar 8."

"His name is Legg, isn't it?" queried Barnhardt.

"Yeah."

"What else do you know about him, Tex?"

"Not a thing—do you?"

"Only what Johnny Grant said. Legg told him that he used to be a bookkeeper in San Francisco."

"Yeah? Well, he better go back and sling some more ink."

Barnhardt smiled slowly.

"And he's staying at the Double Bar 8, is he?"

"Not very —— long, he ain't!" snapped Tex.

He whirled on his heel and looked down toward the sheriff's office, where Marion was just coming out, accompanied by the sheriff.

"How long before they can identify that dog, Lee?" he asked.

"When the train gets in tonight, Tex."

"Uh-huh. I'll see yuh later, Lee."

"All right; and in the meantime you better think over some of the things I've told you."

But Tex did not reply. Marion had mounted her horse. Tex called to her, but she did not reply, as she spurred her horse to a gallop, heading toward home. Tex swore softly and went on, joining the sheriff at the doorway of the office.

"Hyah, Tex," greeted the sheriff.

"All right, Scotty," grunted Tex. "Mind lettin' me see the Taylor family?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"Can't do it, Tex. I've got my orders from the prosecutor. After t'night, yuh maybe can; but no chance, until after we know a little more about things."

Tex scowled heavily.

"What evidence have yuh got, Scotty?"

"Dog. Answers the description."

"Yea-a-ah?"

Tex leaned one shoulder against the wall of the building and began rolling a cigaret. He looked quizzically at the sheriff as he said—

"Scotty, did yuh ever wonder why them three men locked yuh in yore own jail?"

The sheriff considered the question gravely, as if it had never occurred to him before. He smiled softly and shook his head.

"No; did you, Tex?"

"It's none of my business, Scotty."

"No? You don't think Eskimo, Johnny and Oyster had anythin' to do with the hold-up, do yuh?"

"I didn't say they did, Scotty."

"There was four men in that hold-up. Old George Bonnette was in Blue Wells that night. They'd 'a' had to get an outsider to help 'em, Tex. We've got to find four men."

"But there's only three in yore jail right now, Scotty."

"Yeah; there's still the owner of the dog."

"Then yuh don't think the dog belongs to Taylor?"

"No, I don't. The man who owns the dog is the man who got on the express car at Encinas, and fought with the messenger. The dog was just a blind for that man to get on there. He was the fourth one of the gang, and he probably didn't figure on the messenger puttin' up a fight. He caught up with the express car as quick as possible and took the dog. The fact that he took a chance to get the dog makes it look like a cinch that if we can find the owner of that dog, we can land the whole bunch."

It was a long explanation for Scotty Olson, and he was all out of breath.

"How about that feller Legg, at the AK, Scotty? He'd make a fourth man."

"Him!" Scotty laughed. "Which man would he make? Not the big feller that fought the messenger. And —— knows he ain't one of the masked men that blew the safe."

"Don't be too sure. He'd look pretty —— big behind a black mask, looking over the top of a six-gun. That engine crew was so —— scared they wouldn't have known whether they were big men or small ones."

"How do you know how scared they was, Tex?"

The sheriff snapped the question quickly. Tex stiffened slightly and his shoulder swayed away from the wall.

"Just figurin' 'em to be human," he said softly.

"Oh, yeah." The sheriff's smile was hidden behind his big mustache. "I reckon we'll get along all right. It takes time to figure out things, Tex. Wade's no fool. He's investigatin' every clue—him and Porter. I understand that the Santa Rita has hired a detective. Him and Le Moyne are on the case, kinda workin' independent of my office, I suppose." Scotty smiled. "But that's all right. We want the men who got that thirty thousand."

Tex nodded coldly.

"Good luck to yuh, Scotty. But if I was you, I wouldn't look for them men in Blue Wells. They're a —— of a long ways from here, I'll betcha."

"I'm no —— palmist," said Scotty slowly. "If they're out of the county I can't do nothin', but if they're around here, I'm goin' after 'em good and hard."

"Sure," nodded Tex, and went after his horse, while the sheriff looked after him quizzically.

"I wonder what you know, Tex Alden," he said to himself. "I seen yuh talkin' with Lee Barnhardt—and he'll prob'ly defend Taylor, if this comes to court. By golly, I'm gettin' suspicious of everybody. Wade says you've got to suspect everybody, if yo're goin' to be a successful detective; so I expect I'm startin' out in the right way."

CHAPTER VIII

A REGULAR JOB

IT WAS supper time at the AK ranch when Jimmy Legg rode in. The boys had discovered his horse when they returned, and had decided that Jimmy had been thrown. They were going to wait until after supper before starting a search.

He told them of the incident and of the long walk to the Double Bar 8 ranch.

"Didja leave that girl alone there?" asked Eskimo.

"She went back to town," explained Jimmy. "I guess she wanted to be there when the railroad men tried to identify that dog, and she said she'd stay in Blue Wells all night."

"I'd kinda like to be there too," said Johnny Grant. "I've been at the Taylor ranch quite a lot, but I don't remember any dog of that description."

"Let's all go in after supper," suggested Oyster. "I've got a few dollars that's restless."

Old George Bonnette called Jimmy aside after supper.

"What do yuh aim to do?" asked the old man.

Jimmy smiled foolishly.

"I kinda wanted to be a cowpuncher," he confessed, lapsing into the dialect easily.

"Yuh do, eh?" Bonnette smiled. "That's quite an ambition, don'tcha think? Forty a month, and feed. Yo're educated, Legg. I don't *sabe* why yuh want to be a puncher."

"I've got a reason, Mr. Bonnette."

"Some girl dare yuh to be a cowboy?"

"There's a woman in the case," confessed Jimmy.

Bonnette grunted softly and helped himself to a liberal chew of tobacco.

"I thought as much," he grinned. "Well, you ain't—yet. I'm full-up on hired hands right now, Legg. It'll soon be round-up time, and yuh might come in handy.

"It'll mean a —— of a lot of hard work. I can't pay yuh a cowpuncher's wages, because yuh don't *sabe* the work well enough to earn it; but I'll pay yuh half-salary.

It'll sure as —— be an education to you, if yuh want to be a puncher. But I'm —— if I know why yuh want to."

"Thanks," smiled Jimmy. "Johnny Grant asked you to do this, didn't he?"

"Well, he said yuh was jist brainless enough to make a good puncher, if that's what yuh mean."

"Don't cowpunchers have any brains, Mr. Bonnette?"

"Huh!" The old man spat explosively. "Evidence is all agin' 'em! If they had any brains, they wouldn't punch cows."

Jimmy thanked him for the half-pay job, and rode away with the three cowpunchers, after Bonnette had warned them not to antagonize the sheriff again.

"Yo're gettin' a bad reputation," declared Bonnette. "Next thing I know I'll have some cripples hobblin' around here."

"We're plumb antiseptic now," assured Johnny Grant. "There ain't money enough in the crowd to start anythin'."

They headed for town, talking about the robbery. None of them had told Jimmy about their battle with the engineer and fireman. The AK boys were tight-mouthed over it, because they didn't want to be hauled in on the case, and they were just a little suspicious about Jimmy Legg.

Near where the AK road paralleled the railroad, it intersected with the road from Encinas, and as they neared the intersection they saw two riders coming from the east, jogging along through the dust, as if time was of no importance.

The four riders from the AK drew rein and waited for the two cowboys, thinking them to be two of the Blue Wells riders. But in this they were mistaken, as the two riders were strangers to the country.

One of them was a lean, rangy sort of individual, with a long face, prominent nose, wide mouth, and widely spaced blue eyes, set in a mass of tiny wrinkles. The other rider was of medium height, rather blocky of countenance, wide-mouthed, and with deep grin-wrinkles, which seemed to end beneath a firm jaw. His eyes were wide, blue and innocent.

Both men were dressed in range costume, well-worn, weathered. Their riding rigs were polished from much usage, and the boys from the AK noted that their belts and holsters were hand-made by men who knew the sag of human anatomy. The tall man removed his battered sombrero, disclosing a crop of roan-colored hair, and the wide grin, which suffused his whole face, showed a set of strong, white teeth.

"Howdy," smiled the tall man. "Is this the road to Blue Wells?"

"It sure is," grinned Johnny. He instinctively liked this tall man, whose grin was contagious.

"Well, that's good," nodded the shorter man.

Johnny Grant's eyes had strayed to their two horses, which were branded on the left shoulder with a Circle X, the iron of a ranch about twelve miles east of Encinas.

"We're goin' to Blue Wells," said Eskimo, "and we'll see that yuh don't stray."

"That's sure kind of yuh," said the innocent-eyed one. "You don't know what a load that takes off my mind."

Eskimo squinted closely at him, but could not determine whether the man was joking or not. Johnny Grant moved his horse in closer.

"My name's Grant," he told them.

He turned in his saddle and introduced the others, concluding with Jimmy Legg, of whom he said:

"This is Jimmy Legg. He wants to be a cowpuncher so badly that he don't know what to do—and we're teachin' him."

"I'm sure he'll make a good one," said the innocent-eyed stranger, sizing up the uncomfortable Jimmy. "Yuh can't hardly tell him from one now. If yuh hadn't told us about him, we'd never know but what he was a top-hand. My name is Stevens. My pardner answers to the name of Hartley, and we're proud to know you gents."

"Proud to know you," nodded the boys of the AK.

"We might as well mosey along," said Johnny. "You aimin' to stay in Blue Wells a while, gents?"

"All depends," said "Hashknife" Hartley. "We hear that the Fall round-up is about to start, and thought we might hook on with some cow-outfit. We ain't never been in here, yuh see."

"Well, yuh might," admitted Johnny. "I dunno how the rest of the ranches are fixed for help."

"Does anythin' ever happen around here?" asked "Sleepy" Stevens. "You know what I mean—any excitement?"

"Everythin' happens," said Eskimo, and they proceeded to regale them with a story of the robbery.

Johnny Grant went into details regarding the dog, which figured in the evidence, and by the time they got to Blue Wells, Hashknife and Sleepy knew practically all the details, as far as was known.

"We'll know more about it when the train gets in," said Oyster. "Them trainmen say they can identify the dog, if it's the same one."

They rode in to Blue Wells, and tied their horses at the Oasis hitch-rack. Hashknife and Sleepy went to the Oasis hotel, where they secured a room, after which they took their horses to the livery-stable.

Quite a crowd of people had gathered in Blue Wells, waiting for the train to come in. There was much speculation as to whether or not the trainmen could identify the dog as being the one on the express car. Tex Alden was in town, as was Le Moyne. Johnny Grant pointed out Le Moyne, and introduced Hashknife to Tex.

Hashknife did not strike Tex for a job, but merely exchanged a few words with him. They met the sheriff in the Oasis, and Johnny introduced him to Hashknife. But the sheriff was not friendly, and Johnny explained the reasons why. They found Al Porter and Wade, the railroad detective, but Porter gave Johnny a wide berth. He could see that Johnny had imbibed a few drinks, and Mr. Porter did not want his dignity disturbed.

The train arrived on time, and the crowd repaired to the hall over Abe Moon's store, which was used as a court-room. Jimmy Legg had imbibed a large drink of liquor, which had caused him to forget certain things, and as a result he found himself in the hall, almost rubbing shoulders with the express messenger.

The sheriff ordered every one to sit down and not to interfere with the proceedings. He brought Apostle Paul Taylor, Buck Taylor and Peeler into the room and seated them against the wall. The half-breed was frightened, but the Taylor family were cool. Marion was there, and joined her father. Hashknife and Sleepy remained in the background, watching the proceedings.

Al Porter, the deputy, brought the dog into the room, a short piece of rope tied to its collar. It was Geronimo! Jimmy Legg gasped, drew his hat farther over his face and acted indifferent.

Geronimo apparently thought that the gathering was for his special benefit, for he cavorted on the end of the rope, barking, whining, sniffing. Suddenly he whirled around, headed toward Jimmy Legg, head up, sniffing. The scent of the man who had befriended him!

His sudden lunge almost yanked the rope out of Porter's hands, and his paws scraped across Jimmy Legg's knees, when the angry deputy jerked the dog back to him. Jimmy gasped with relief, looked up from under the low-pulled brim of his hat, and found the railroad detective looking at him.

The engineer and fireman positively identified the dog. The express messenger was not so positive, but said that it surely looked like the same dog. Johnny Grant, with a few drinks of liquor under his belt, walked out and took a close look at the dog.

"I've been at the Double Bar 8 a lot of times," he told the sheriff, "but I never seen that dog before. I like dogs, Scotty. I never miss a chance to play with a dog, and if that dog was a reg'lar at the Double Bar 8, I'd shore know it."

"Buck swears he raised it from a pup," replied the sheriff.

"Buck wasn't telling the truth," said Marion. "He was mad at you for kicking it, and questioning the ownership."

"When did you see it the first time, Miss Taylor?" asked the sheriff.

"When it came home with dad, Buck and Peeler."

"The day after the hold-up, eh?"

"Yes."

The railroad detective sauntered up.

"Where did they say they got the dog, Miss Taylor?" he asked.

"Why, they said it picked up with them, when they were on their way home from Yellow Horn Mesa."

The sheriff smiled and told Porter to take the dog back to the office.

"I reckon we'll hang on to the dog until we find out who owns it," he said.

"But you can't hold us any longer," protested Apostle Paul.

"Can't I?"

"It's a bailable offense," said the detective. "I suppose you'll have a hearing tomorrow, and have your bail set."

"And have to stay in jail tonight, eh?"

"Yes; unless the judge wants to hold a night session."

"Which he won't," declared Porter. "Old Judge Parkridge will take his own sweet time—and it won't be at night."

The sheriff removed his prisoners and the crowd filed down the stairs. Jimmy Legg moved in beside Marion and went down to the street with her. Most of the crowd headed for the Oasis, and Tex Alden was with them. He stopped long enough to see that Jimmy Legg was with Marion, but went on.

"Gee, that's a dirty shame, Miss Taylor," said Jimmy. "They haven't anything on your father, nor any of the rest."

"Oh, I know it, Mr. Legg; but what can we do?"

"You might start in by calling me Jimmy. I hate the rest of my name. It's James Eaton Legg. Sounds like a cannibal, doesn't it. Parents never stop to think, when they're naming innocent children."

"All right, Jimmy—if you'll call me Marion. Every one does. We are not formal out here in the wilderness."

"I'm glad you're not. My feet feel fine in those socks. I'll buy me some tonight and give Buck a new pair."

"Don't bother about that, Jimmy."

"No bother at all. Say, that Tex Alden don't like me, does he?"

"Possibly not."

"Does he—" Jimmy hesitated.

"Does he what, Jimmy?"

"Oh, that's a little too personal, Marion."

"I suppose so. You meant to ask me if Tex thought he had the right to say who I shall speak to, didn't you?"

"Well, has he?"

"Only in his own mind."

Jimmy laughed softly.

"Some folks are blessed with wonderful imaginations. Are you going to stay at the hotel tonight?"

"Yes, I'll stay there tonight, anyway."

They walked up the street and met Chet Le Moyne in front of Abe Moon's store. He shook hands with Marion, who introduced him to Jimmy.

"You are paymaster of the Santa Rita mine, aren't you?" asked Jimmy. "I thought that's what Johnny Grant said."

"Yes," said Le Moyne patronizingly. "And you are the new cowboy at the AK ranch."

"Yea-a-ah," drawled Jimmy. "That's me."

Marion laughed.

"He's going to be a good one, too."

"As good as any," laughed Jimmy.

"You've had a good start, I hear," chuckled Le Moyne. "They tell me that you almost killed Scotty Olson and Lee Barnhardt the day you came here."

"And never got arrested," laughed Jimmy. "This is a wonderful country."

Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens came out of the store, halted on the edge of the sidewalk to light their cigarets, and went on across the street.

"Who are those men?" asked Marion. "I noticed the tall one looking at me in the court room."

"One—the tall one—is named Hartley," said Jimmy. "The other is Stevens. They met us at the forks of the road this evening, and rode in with us. They're strangers here, it seems."

Marion and Jimmy strolled on toward the hotel and Le Moyne went to the store. Hashknife and Sleepy mingled with the crowd in the Oasis, and finally took seats at a table near the rear of the place. Business was good, all the games filled, and the bar was doing a big business.

The engineer, fireman and the express messenger came over to the saloon and joined the crowd at the bar.

"Plenty of excitement," observed Hashknife. "This hold-up seems to have kinda stirred up Blue Wells, Sleepy."

"Yeah," Sleepy did not seem to be very enthusiastic.

"Aw, shake yore hide," grinned Hashknife. "You act like a mourner at a funeral, cowboy."

"I'm all right," muttered Sleepy. "But it makes me tired. Every time we go anywhere, somethin' happens. There's no peace anywhere. When them fellers was tellin' about that hold-up, yore nose was twitchin' like the nose of a pointer dog. Dang it, me and you didn't come here to hunt bandits."

Hashknife chuckled softly.

"And I'm not huntin' 'em, Sleepy. What do yuh think of that? I ain't lost no bandits. It's nothin' to me how many pay-rolls they steal."

"Then don't say nothin' more about that girl, Hashknife. Ever since you got a look at her, you've spoke about her several times."

"Pshaw! I didn't realize it, Sleepy. Mebbe I just remarked about her folks all bein' in jail."

"Let 'em stay in jail," grunted Sleepy heartlessly. "They prob'ly robbed that train. We didn't come here to—"

"I know that sentence by heart, Sleepy. And you ought to know my reply. But that don't alter the fact that she's one pretty girl."

"There yuh go!" gloomily.

Johnny Grant had spotted them and was coming their way, slightly unsteady on his legs, but grinning widely.

"C'mon and have a drink," he urged. "I jist runs four-bits into a ten-spot in the black-jack game. If yuh don't drink yuh can have a see-gar. But I warns yuh, their see-gars are a lot older than the liquor they sell. C'mon up to the bar and meet some of the folks."

Neither of them wanted a drink, but they did want to be friendly with Johnny Grant and his crowd; so they elbowed their way to the bar. Ed Gast and Bill Bailey, of the X Bar 6, were at the bar, and Johnny introduced them, after which he deposited his money on the bar, and demanded action.

"Beatin' that game is as easy as holdin' up a train," he declared, chuckling. "Runs four-bits up to ten dollars, and sticks my thumb at m' nose at the dealer."

Hashknife noticed that the sheriff was at the bar, and that Johnny's remark interested him.

"Except that yuh can't very well lose at holdin' up a train," added Eskimo Swenson, who had caught the sheriff's reflection in the mirror. "If yuh ever get the money in yore hands, yo're as safe as a church. Political affluence shore as —— don't make a sheriff a man-catcher."

Realizing that this conversation was for his benefit, the sheriff moved away from the bar, while the AK boys chuckled over their drinks. Even Sleepy Stevens shed his pessimistic attitude and grinned.

"These are home folks," he said to Hashknife. "It appears that the sheriff ain't standin' very well with the AK."

"Aw, he's all right," said Oyster. "Scotty's as good as the average sheriff, except that he's too serious. He'd give his right eye for a chance to prove first degree murder agin' the whole AK outfit, because we devil him. He's—"

The men at the bar jerked around when from out in the street came the unmistakable sound of a revolver shot.

"Somebody celebratin'," decided Johnny Grant, as the sheriff and several men moved to the doorway and went outside.

They gulped their drinks, and went out into the street, where the only lights were those from the saloon and store windows.

"Somebody tryin' to be funny," grumbled the sheriff.

He went back into the Oasis. Some men had come from Moon's store across the street, evidently wondering who had fired the shot. Two men with a lantern were fussing around a wagon in front of the blacksmith shop. One of the men came across from the store and went into the Oasis. It was Chet Le Moyne.

"Well, I reckon it was some puncher wishful of makin' a noise," decided Johnny Grant.

They turned and were going back into the saloon, when some one called from the hotel, which was across the street, and about a block north of the Oasis.

"C'mere!" yelled the man. He was evidently calling to some one in the hotel. "Come out and help me with this feller!"

"That sounds like somethin' wrong," said Hashknife. "Let's go and see what it is."

They hurried up the street and crossed to the hotel, where several men had gathered around a man who was lying flat on the ground.

"He's been shot," they heard one of them say. "Better pack him into the hotel and send for a doctor."

A man scratched a match, but it flickered out. Hashknife shoved him aside, dropped on his knees beside the man, and ignited a match, with a snap of his thumb-nail. The illumination showed a gory face, gray as ashes, where the blood had not stained.

"My ——!" blurted Johnny. "It's Jimmy Legg!"

He dropped on his knees beside Hashknife, grasping Jimmy's shoulders.

"Hey! Jimmy!" he exclaimed.

"Don't shake him!" roared Eskimo. "You big idiot!"

"Somebody go and find a doctor," ordered Hashknife. "We'll take him in the hotel."

They carried him into the little hotel office, where there was light enough for them to discover that Jimmy Legg had missed death by a very scant margin. The bullet had struck him just above his left ear, slanted along his skull, and had furrowed deeply for about three inches.

Some one had gone after a doctor, and in the meantime Hashknife secured a basin of water and a towel, with which he mopped some of the blood away.

"I heard that shot," said the proprietor of the hotel. "I thought it was somebody just makin' a noise. Say, I seen that young feller talkin' to Miss Taylor not five minutes ago. They was just outside the door there."

"To Miss Taylor, eh?" Johnny blinked at the lamp. "Is she here now?"

The commotion in the office attracted Marion's attention, and she was standing in the hallway door when Johnny spoke.

"I'm here," she said. "What do you want of me?"

The cowboys removed their hats, as Johnny went toward her.

"You was talkin' with Jimmy Legg a few minutes ago?" he asked.

"Why yes." She was unable to see the man on the floor.

"Well, he got shot," said Johnny bluntly.

"Shot?" Marion jerked forward. "Did somebody—not dead?"

"He ain't badly hurt, ma'am," said Hashknife. "The doctor will fix him up in no time."

Marion came forward to where she could see. Her face was white and her two hands were clenched tightly, as she looked at Jimmy Legg, stretched on the floor.

"Why, I just left him a minute or so ago," she whispered. "Where did it happen?"

"Jist out in the street," replied Johnny. "By ——, I want to find the jasper that shot the poor devil!"

"If yuh do, don't keep it to yourself," growled Eskimo.

Marion stopped at the desk, bracing herself with one hand.

"Who would shoot him?" wondered Eskimo. "He wouldn't hurt anybody. If it had been one of us—"

"That would be justified," finished Johnny Grant.

Jimmy Legg lifted his head and stared around, blinking his eyes.

"What was it?" he whispered.

"Somebody took a shot at yuh," said Johnny quickly.

Jimmy Legg felt of his head.

"Hit me, didn't they?"

At this moment the doctor arrived, ordered them to carry Jimmy to a room, and proceeded to fix up the wound. Marion insisted on helping him, and Jimmy blinked his gratitude.

"Did you see the man who shot at you?" asked Marion.

"I never knew I was shot, until I woke up, Marion. You had just gone into the hotel, and I started to cross the street, when I saw a big flash, like an explosion. But I never heard the noise."

The doctor washed and sewed up the wound. It was a painful proceeding, but Jimmy gritted his teeth and did not make a sound.

"You better get a room here at the hotel and go to bed," advised the doctor. But Jimmy refused.

"I'm all right," he insisted. "It aches a little, but not enough to put me in bed. Gee, it sure knocked me out!"

"And you're lucky to be alive," said the doctor, packing his kit-bag. "An inch further to the right, and you'd have no top on your head right now."

The crowd was just outside the door, waiting for the doctor to finish, and they crowded in, hardly giving the doctor a chance to wiggle his way out into the hall. Jimmy held out his hand to Marion, disregarding the clamoring cowboys.

"Thank you," he said. "It was nice of you to stay with me."

Marion colored slightly, and her reply was drowned in Johnny Grant's greeting.

"Hyah, Topknot! Howsa head, Jimmy?"

"Don't jiggle me!" laughed Jimmy. "My face is so tight I can hardly laugh."

"Don't laugh," advised Eskimo. "Now who do yuh know that might hate yuh enough to shoot yuh, Jimmy?"

Jimmy frowned painfully at the floor, and when he looked up he caught Marion's eye. Tex Alden's threat came back to him—

"The Blue Wells country is sure damp for your kind."

Jimmy tried to smile, but it was only a grimace.

"I dunno," he said slowly. "I haven't had any trouble with any one here, except that day I accidently shot at the sheriff and the lawyer."

"But that was an accident," said Johnny. "Nobody blames yuh for that. Somebody wanted to kill yuh, kid."

"Maybe," faltered Jimmy, "they mistook me for somebody else."

As Jimmy spoke he was looking at Marion, and he switched his eyes to Hashknife, who was watching him closely. The eyes of the tall cowboy seemed to bore into him, and Jimmy turned away.

"You was talkin' with Miss Taylor just a minute or so before yuh got shot, eh?" Oyster Shell had an idea.

"Yes."

"Uh-hah!"

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Johnny.

"Aw, let's go and get a drink," suggested Oyster. "Jimmy is all right. How about yuh, Jimmy?"

"I'm fine," replied Jimmy. "Except that my feet don't track and there's a ton of rocks on my head—I'm as good as ever."

They moved out of the hotel and headed for the Oasis, where Jimmy was the center of attraction. Le Moyne and Dug Haley were there. Johnny introduced them to Hashknife and Sleepy, and they all drank to the poor aim of some bushwhacker.

After a few more drinks the AK boys decided to go home. Jimmy's head was bothering him, and Johnny Grant decided that a bunk was the best place for Jimmy Legg. Before they left, the sheriff and deputy bustled in, having just heard of the shooting, and wanted a detailed account of it.

"Aw, whatsa use?" wailed Eskimo. "Somebody popped Jimmy on the head with a bullet, and that's all there is to it. Unless petrification sets in, he'll be able to fall off a horse agin' tomorrow—as usual. C'mon."

And the sheriff was obliged to get his information from those who knew as much about it as the AK boys did. He went back to his office with Al Porter, and they sat down to discuss it.

"Well, who do yuh think tried to kill the tenderfoot?" queried Porter.

"If we didn't have three men in jail, facin' a charge of holdin' up a train, I'd say that this here Legg person was the fourth one of the gang, and that some of 'em tried to bump him off for somethin'."

"Well, I'll be ——!" snorted Porter. "If we can't hang it on to the Taylor gang, that might be worth workin' on, Scotty. But who are these two strange cowpunchers who rode in with the AK gang tonight? Johnny Grant acts kinda friendly with 'em."

"I don't know, Al. I reckon I'll hit the hay. Tomorrow we hold a hearin' for the Taylor gang, and we'll see what we'll see. You better feed that —— dog before yuh go to bed, or he might mistake old Judge Parkridge for a strip of jerky. —— knows, he looks like one."

CHAPTER IX

COMPLICATIONS

THE Taylor hearing was more or less of a farce, but it left Apostle Paul, Buck and Peeler, the half-breed, high and dry in the Blue Wells jail until the next term of court. Old Judge Parkridge, near-sighted, more than slightly deaf, a mummified old jurist, set their bail at one thousand dollars cash, each—bail which no one would furnish.

There was no evidence against them, except the fact that they had the dog, and that they could not prove that they had spent the night on Yellow Horn Mesa. So they were formally charged with train robbery and held until the next session of court, which would not be held for three weeks.

Apostle Paul Taylor cursed the judge, who could not hear it, and went back to the jail, followed by Buck and Peeler. Marion was broken-hearted, but did not show it. She sat down in the sheriff's office and tried to reason out just what to do. The Double Bar 8 could not afford to hire men, and she could not do the work alone.

The sheriff did not try to solace her. He was tongue-tied in her presence. Then Tex Alden showed up. He had not been at the hearing, but had been told all about it.

"That's sure tough, Marion," he told her. "I'll tell yuh what I'll do—I'll send some of my men down to run the ranch for yuh, and it won't cost yuh a cent."

"No, thank you, Mr. Alden."

Tex colored quickly. It was the first time she had ever called him "Mr. Alden."

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked quickly. "What have I done?"

"You know what you did," she retorted. "Please don't bother yourself about my affairs."

Tex stared at her wonderingly.

"Well, for gosh sake!" he blurted. "Hm-m-m-m! Whatsa matter now?"

But Marion turned away from him and stared out through one of the dirty windows. Tex whistled softly and walked outside. He stopped, turned, as if to go back, but changed his mind and went on up the street, whistling unmusically between his teeth, his brow furrowed.

Lee Barnhardt, the lawyer, was coming from his office, and met Tex in front of the general store.

"Wasn't that a —— of a verdict, Tex?" he asked.

"Verdict? Oh, yeah." Tex looked thoughtfully at the lean-faced attorney. "I'm wonderin' who'll run the Double Bar 8 until after the trial, Lee?"

"I don't know; never thought about it, Tex. Say, did you hear about that AK tenderfoot getting shot last night?"

"Legg?"

"Yes. Some one shot him last night, almost in front of the hotel."

"Yea-a-ah? Kill him?"

"No," Barnhardt laughed. "Skull was too hard, I guess. He had been standing there, talking with Marion Taylor, and just after she went into the hotel, some one shot him. But he was able to ride back to the AK; so I guess he's all right."

Tex took a deep breath and looked back toward the sheriff's office. Marion was coming up the street. He turned to Barnhardt.

"I hadn't heard about it, Lee. I left just after the trainmen had identified the dog."

Tex turned on his heel and went across the street, disappearing in the Oasis saloon.

Marion joined Barnhardt and they walked to his office. The girl did not like Barnhardt, but her father had engaged him to handle their defense. Hashknife and Sleepy had talked with several of the cowboys, and it was their opinion that none of the cattle outfits would put on extra men until the round-up.

Hashknife went to the sheriff's office and had a talk with Scotty Olson. Hashknife had heard the cowboys talking about the Double Bar 8, and the fact that there was no one, except the girl, to run the ranch. Hashknife explained to the sheriff that he and Sleepy would be willing to run the Double Bar 8, at least until the round-up started, and without wages.

"What's the idea?" queried Scotty. It looked fishy to him.

"Merely helpin' out," smiled Hashknife. "It'll save us a hotel bill, and we might as well be workin' as settin' around a saloon."

Scotty smoothed his mustaches and admitted that it would be a great help to the Taylor family.

"C'mon in and meet Apostle Paul," suggested the sheriff.

Hashknife followed him to the cells and was introduced to Marion's father, who scrutinized Hashknife closely, when the sheriff explained what Hartley and his partner were willing to do.

"I thought mebbe Tex Alden would help us out," said the old man.

"Yuh can hang that idea up in the smokehouse," said the sheriff. "Tex met yore daughter a while ago, and she kinda snubbed him up real short, Paul."

"Yea-a-ah? Well, I'll be ——! See if yuh can get holt of her, Scotty."

The sheriff left Hashknife with Taylor, while he found Marion. The old man had little to say to Hashknife, and the conversation dragged heavily until the sheriff brought her in and introduced her to Hashknife.

"Did Tex offer to help us out?" asked Taylor.

Marion nodded quickly.

"He did; and I refused his offer. And he knows why I refused it, Dad."

"Gosh a'mighty—why?"

"I can't tell you now."

"Uh-huh. Well, I jist wanted to know if he did. Mr. Hartley and his pardner offer to help yuh run the ranch at least until the round-up starts, and it shore looks generous—comin' from strangers."

"It certainly is generous!" exclaimed Marion. "Dad, I think I can get Nanah to stay with me."

"That'll be fine. I'm much obliged to yuh, Hartley, and I'll not be forgettin' this favor. We're shore up agin' a hard deal. How soon can yuh go out to the ranch?"

"I broke a State record on saddlin' a bronc once," grinned Hashknife. "Our animals are in the livery-stable, and I know Sleepy is plumb willin' to give up that bed at the hotel."

"Then we'll all ride out together," said Marion. "My horse is there too."

Hashknife found Sleepy at Moon's store and introduced him to Marion. Lee Barnhardt was there, and heard Hashknife explain to Sleepy that they were going to run the Double Bar 8. The lean-necked lawyer's brows elevated momentarily, and he wondered why Tex Alden hadn't handled that end of the deal.

Sleepy went with Marion to get the horses, while Hashknife secured paper and envelopes from Moon, and wrote a letter. Lee Barnhardt sat on a counter across the room, and wondered who this tall cowboy might be. Lee did not believe in philanthropy, and he wondered just why these two cowboys should offer to work the Double Bar 8 for nothing. He watched Hashknife, who hunched over the counter, taking much time over the composition of his letter.

Lee moved over to that counter and bought some tobacco he did not need. Hashknife sealed the letter and began directing the envelope. Lee walked slowly past him, getting a flash of the address on the letter, which was directed to Leesom & Brand, Attorneys at Law, Chicago.

If Lee Barnhardt expected to find any clue to Hashknife's identity, he could hardly find it in the address of a letter, but he smiled queerly as he walked to his office and sat down, twiddling his thumbs.

But it was not a pleasant smile, and his head sunk into his collar until the wattles of his wry-neck protruded. For about ten minutes he sat thus, totally absorbed in his own thoughts, which were finally broken by the entrance of Tex Alden, who had been depleting the stock of the Oasis saloon until he fairly reeked with alcoholic fumes.

"What do you know about them two fellers goin' out to the Taylor ranch?" he demanded of Barnhardt.

"Eh?" Lee looked up quickly. "Oh, yes. What about 'em?"

"That's what I want to know, by ——!"

"You're sore about something, ain't you, Tex?"

"Yo're —— right I am! Who authorized them two punchers to run that place?"

"Well, I didn't. It wasn't any of my business. Tex, you don't need to get drunk and come roaring into my office. I never sent them out there. It seems to me that Miss Taylor was perfectly willing to have them go out there. And they talked with old Apostle Paul. Don't hop me; hop them."

"Hop, ——!" Tex leaned on the desk and glared at Barnhardt.

"Go to it, Tex. Hop anything you want to, but leave me out. Did you offer to run the ranch for her?"

"I did, —— it!"

Lee smiled at Tex's flushed face.

"What did she say?"

"None of yore —— business!"

"Mm-m-m-m! Must have been a good reason."

"Who are these strange punchers?"

Lee shook his head.

"How would I know? They're going to run the Double Bar 8 for nothing. Rather charitable for a pair of strangers, don't you think, Tex?"

"Too —— charitable."

"That's my opinion. But I don't know a thing against 'em."

"Know anythin' for 'em?" bluntly.

"Not a thing, Tex. Marion is a mighty pretty girl, and—"

"Drop that!" snapped Tex angrily. "Leave her out of it."

"Oh, all right. But she didn't talk as though she hated either of them. I heard her talking to them in Moon's store a while ago."

Tex's black eyes snapped angrily.

"I want to know a few things," he said evenly. "I'm no —— fool!"

"Well, you'll not find out anything from me, because I don't know anything to tell you, Tex. I'm no judge of human nature, but I'd go easy with those two men. I don't think you can scare 'em. They've probably got a reason for running the Taylor ranch—for nothing."

"They can't scare me, by ——!"

"They probably won't try," smiled Barnhardt. "Any way, they have no reason for trying to scare you. Tex, does their names mean anything to you?"

"Their names? Hartley and Stevens? Not a —— thing."

"Ask Plenty Goode about it?"

"What would he know about 'em, Lee?"

"Do you remember one night out at the X Bar 6, just after Goode had hired out to you, and I was there? We were talking about rustlers and horse-thieves, and Goode told us some of the things that happened in the Modoc country. He lived at Black Wells, I believe. Don't you remember the names now, Tex?"

"Lee, I believe yo're right. What was it he called the tall one?"

"Hashknife."

"That was it! But are these the same men, Lee?"

"I heard the tall one called by that name a while ago."

"Huh! What do yuh reckon they're doin' over here?"

Lee smiled crookedly.

"I dunno, Tex; but it has probably got something to do with the train robbery. And if I had held up that train, I'd sure hate to have these men on my trail. Ask Goode more about them, Tex."

Tex nodded slowly, thoughtfully. Suddenly he jerked ahead, his eyes boring into Barnhardt.

"Why should I worry about 'em? They can't hang anythin' on to me, by ——!"

"Oh, all right," sighed Lee. "I know I'd like to have that eight thousand dollars back from you. You better give it to me pretty quick, because I can't cover it up very long."

"Why can't yuh? The round-up count can be long. You handle all the business for the X Bar 6, and you can add those cattle to your report. They don't know the sale was made."

"Compound a felony, eh? Turn crook for you, Tex?"

"Turn ——! Listen, Lee." Tex leaned across the desk and poked a finger at Lee's nose. "Yo're as crooked as a snake in a cactus patch. You'd double-cross yore best friend for a dollar. Don't swaller so hard! I mean what I'm tellin' yuh. You told me about that Santa Rita pay-roll, because you wanted yore cut out of it, and yo're sore because yuh didn't get it.

"I haven't any eight thousand dollars. —— yuh; I ain't got no way to get eight thousand dollars. And what's more, I don't think I'd give it to yuh if I had it. Now, roll that up in some tar-paper and smoke it. Any old time you start playin' saint to my sins, yo're goin' to get in wrong. Now, think it over."

Tex surged away from the desk, and went out, scraping his spurs angrily, while Lee Barnhardt looked after him, gloomy-eyed, his lips compressed tightly. Finally he sighed and shook his head.

"Lee, your sins are finding you out," he said softly. "That poor fool is trying to bluff you—and he almost did."

CHAPTER X

HASHKNIFE AND SLEEPY, PHILANTHROPISTS

"THIS old place is sure pleasin' to the naked eye," said Hashknife the following morning, while Sleepy washed his face noisily at the old wash-bench near the kitchen door. "I like this old patio, Sleepy. Them walls were sure built to ward off bullets."

"Yeah, and we're in a peaceable neighborhood," grunted Sleepy, his eyes shut against the sting of soap-suds, while he pawed awkwardly along the wall, trying to locate the towel, which Hashknife had deftly removed.

"Where's that —— towel!" he roared. "Gimme that, before I scalp yuh. Dang yuh, Hashknife, you've got a —— of an idea of humor. Ow-w-w-w! Please! My ——, if I ever git m' eyes open ag'in, I'll scalp yuh."

Sleepy danced violently, his dripping hands held at right angles to his body.

"Whatsa idea of the ghost-dance?" queried Hashknife soberly. "The towel is there on the wash-bench, where yuh left it."

This was palpably a falsehood, but Sleepy pawed his way to the bench, found the towel, and wiped his burning eyes.

"You hadn't ought to use laundry soap in yore eyes," said Hashknife reprovingly. "Whatcha cryin' about?"

"You stole that towel! Yeah, yuh did! Oh, well!" Sleepy shrugged his shoulders. "A feller that ain't got no more sense than to throw in with a danged—"

"Halt!" snorted Hashknife. "Say it, and I'll wash out yore mouth, Sleepy."

"Oh, yuh will!" Sleepy glared at Hashknife, who was in line with the kitchen door, where Marion stood, laughing.

"Ex-cuse me, Miss Taylor," said Sleepy. "If you'd lived with Hashknife—uh—I mean, if you—" Sleepy floundered and wiped his eyes.

"You'll excuse him, Miss Taylor," said Hashknife seriously. "He ain't very bright. Ever once in a while he gets a dirty look in his eyes, and has to wash 'em out, yuh see. As a friend he's all right, but when yuh want mental companionship, I'd as soon have that burro yuh call Apollo."

Marion laughed, and invited them in to breakfast. She introduced them to Nanah, a portly Indian woman, whom Sleepy dubbed "Carrie Nation," because she held a hatchet in her left hand, while she shook hands with the other.

"She's related to Peeler," explained Marion.

"Relate by marriage," said Nanah solemnly, as if to amend Marion's statement.

"Nephew?" asked Hashknife, helping himself to a stack of hot-cakes.

"Son," said Nanah seriously.

"Relate by marriage!" exploded Sleepy.

Nanah did not smile. She spilled more batter on the griddle, examined the pitcher closely, as she glanced at Hashknife's plate, possibly fearing she had underestimated their hot-cake ability, and said:

"Somebody say Peeler rob train. —— lie! Too lazy."

"And that's the most perfect alibi I ever heard," laughed Hashknife. "Nanah, I'll bet any jury in Blue Wells would turn him loose on that kind of evidence."

"What do you think of the case?" asked Marion.

Hashknife shook his head.

"I dunno, Miss Taylor. It kinda looks to me as though the sheriff had kinda gone off half-cocked. That old judge ought to be restin' in a cemetery. I dunno how any community could stand for an old mummy like him. He ain't human. There ain't nothin' against 'em, except that darned dog, and the fact they were not home that night."

"But they surely couldn't convict on that evidence."

"Mm-m-m-m-m!" Hashknife masticated thoughtfully. "I dunno. I've seen queer things happen. I 'member a case where one man was suin' another for stealin' his wife, and the cow-jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter against the prosecutin' attorney."

"A-a-a-aw, don't lie like that!" protested Sleepy. "You never seen nothin' of the kind."

"Well, I've seen things just about as bad. I don't trust humanity—not cow-jury humanity. If I was goin' to win that case, I'd do it out of court, Miss Taylor."

"But how could that be done?" asked Marion eagerly.

"Find the men that done the job."

"An easy thing to think about," observed Sleepy, leaning back to let Nanah slide a pile of hot-cakes on his plate.

"But the sheriff won't do anything now," said Marion. "He feels that he has done his duty."

"Prob'ly a good thing he won't," grinned Hashknife. "Any man that wears a mustache like Olson does, couldn't find his own socks inside his boots. That man has all gone to hair."

"Samson wore long hair," reminded Sleepy. "He was strong."

"Strong—yea-a-ah! But did he have any brains? He didn't. If he had any brains he wouldn't have let that woman monkey around him with a pair of shears. Just to prove that he was thick—he slept through the hair-cuttin'. Can yuh imagine that?"

"I think Wade, the railroad detective, was more responsible for the arrests than Olson was," said Marion.

"I've seen him," nodded Hashknife. "He's one of them kinda jiggers that don't care whether he gets the guilty man or not, just so he gets somebody. That feller used to be a policeman in Los Angeles. They take the uniform off a policeman—and he's a detective.

"Do yuh know that the idea of numberin' houses in a city was started by a police department? It was. Their officers was always gettin' into the wrong houses; so they numbered 'em. Nanah, you make gosh-awful good hot-cakes. Yuh do so. You Navajo?"

Nanah nodded quickly.

"Do you speak Navajo?" asked Marion.

Hashknife shook his head.

"Nope. Speak a little Nez Perce, Flathead, Sioux, English and Profane. Yuh have to wear a rag around yore head to learn Navajo."

"And pack a snake around in yore teeth," added Sleepy.

Marion laughed at the expression of Nanah's face.

"I not bite snake," declared the squaw seriously.

"That's right," said Hashknife. "Doncha do it, Nanah."

They shoved back from the table and rolled cigarets, while Nanah and Marion cleared away the dishes.

"If you were going to try and find the men who held up that train—where would you look?" asked Marion.

Hashknife smiled over his cigaret.

"That's hard to say. I'd have to do a little addition, subtraction and division. Didja ever get far enough in school to work on problems where they let X equal the missin' numbers?"

Marion smiled.

"Yes, I have, Mr. Hartley."

"Well, then, don't call me mister. My name's Hashknife. Now, that yuh know me well enough to call me Hashknife, I'd say that I'd let about four X's equal the missin' bandits, and work out the problem from there. We've got the dog. Workin' backwards from a dog, yuh ought to get quite a lot.

"In the beginnin', I'd like to ask yuh what yuh know about a feller who is workin' for the AK outfit who is named Jimmy Legg."

"James Eaton Legg," said Marion solemnly. "He said it sounded like a cannibal. I don't know a thing about him, except that he came to Blue Wells the night of the robbery. Johnny Grant took a liking to him, and took him out to the AK, where he's been falling off horses ever since. He says he's going to learn to be a cowboy, if he lives long enough—and that's all I know about him."

"Not much," mused Hashknife. "Nice boy?"

"Certainly he's nice," said Marion, without hesitation.

"I s'pose so," smiled Hashknife. "Bein' as yo're the boss of this outfit, suppose yuh tell us what yuh want done today."

"I don't know," she confessed. "Suppose you spend the day in getting used to the place."

"All right. Mebbe we'll corral a few horses and look 'em over. If we handle the round-up for the Double Bar 8, we're goin' to need a remuda."

"Sure. Suppose you ride back to Blue Wells some time today and bring back the three that are in the livery-stable. We forgot them."

"That's right. How about the chuck-wagon?"

"Oh, I forgot about that. We have always used the X Bar 6 outfit wagons. Tex Alden has always insisted that our outfit was too small to run their own chuck-wagon. But this year—"

Marion's pause was significant. Hashknife realized that everything was not right between the Taylor family and Alden.

"He didn't invite yuh to share his chuck, eh?"

Marion shook her head slowly.

"I guess we'll get along all right."

"Y'betcha," warmly. "We'll kinda look things over, Miss Taylor."

"And now that we're well enough acquainted for you to call me Marion—"

"Oh, all right," laughed Hashknife.

He joined Sleepy in the patio, and they inspected the stables and corrals, with Apollo following them like a dog, trying to nip the brims of their hats.

It was possibly half an hour later that Lee Barnhardt rode in at the ranch, and the Blue Wells attorney was a sight for sore eyes. His mount was a sway-backed sorrel, with a long neck and a whispy tail. Barnhardt did not wear chaps, and the action of the horse had wrinkled his trousers, until the bottoms were up to his knees, showing an expanse of skinny leg and a pair of mismated socks. On his head he wore a sombrero, which was too small for him, and a flannel shirt, so large around the neck that one could easily catch a glimpse of his collar-bone.

He nodded pleasantly to Hashknife and Sleepy and dismounted, allowing his trousers to resume a normal attitude toward his legs.

"I just rode out to see how things were going," he explained. "I spoke to Mr. Taylor about it."

"Well, yuh don't need to apologize," grinned Hashknife. "Of course yuh got here pretty early in the mornin' to find anythin' goin' on. That's quite a bronc you've got."

"Yes; he's all right. Not much for looks, but reliable. Is Miss Taylor at home?"

"I think you'll find her in the house."

"Thank you."

Barnhardt dusted off his clothes, with a flap of his hands, and headed toward the house, while Hashknife and Sleepy grinned at each other.

"That," said Hashknife seriously, "is the attorney."

"I'm disappointed," said Sleepy seriously.

"Yuh don't need to be, Sleepy. Hello! Here comes the next chapter."

Jimmy Legg had arrived at the Double Bar 8, with his head swathed in bandages, his sombrero cocked at an angle. He slid out of his saddle, hitched up his belt and gazed soberly at the two cowboys.

"Hello," he said.

"How's the head?" asked Hashknife.

"Gee, it sure was sore this morning. I didn't sleep much last night. I guess I was scared," Jimmy grinned widely. "Got to thinking how close I came to getting me a harp. Honest, it was an awful dream. You see, I'm not musical at all."

The two cowboys grinned with Jimmy. He looked at the lawyer's horse quizzically.

"Who rides that thing?" he asked.

"An attorney from Blue Wells," said Hashknife.

"Oh, Lee Barnhardt? Well," Jimmy hitched up his belt, "it looks like him. They've both got the same shape neck."

"Yuh hadn't ought to make fun of a horse," said Sleepy.

"No, I suppose not. Really, I shouldn't make fun of anybody. I ought to put in most of my time being thankful I'm alive. I am, too. I've got to go and have the doctor dress my head, but I thought I'd stop and see Miss Taylor. She's going to need some help around here, and I thought I'd offer my services. The AK really don't need me."

"What can you do?" asked Hashknife.

Jimmy shuffled his feet.

"Well," he said slowly, "I really don't know. Unless, of course, she has some horses that need to have some one fall off them. Johnny Grant says I'm the best he has ever seen. He says if you're a champion rider there's always a dispute over it. But if you're a champion faller-off, you've got a cinch title."

The two cowboys laughed at Jimmy, or rather, with him.

"Can yuh handle a rope?" asked Hashknife.

"Not on a horse. There's too many things to remember. I always fell off, trying to keep from tripping my own horse. On the ground, I'm pretty good. Eskimo says I can heat a branding-iron handle hotter than anybody he ever seen. And that about lets me out, I guess."

"Well, yo're honest about it, anyway," laughed Sleepy. "If yuh live long enough, you'll prob'ly be a top-hand about the time they stop raisin' cattle and start on sugar-beets."

"I'd have an even chance with the rest of the cowboys at raising sugar-beets, I suppose."

"You sure are an optimist, pardner," laughed Hashknife. "I hope Miss Taylor can use yuh. We need an optimist around us."

"Fine," grinned Jimmy. "And I'd learn just as much about being a cowboy."

"And maybe live longer," said Sleepy. "Things that might make others shoot—make us laugh. You better tie up yore bronc."

Jimmy tied his horse to a ring in the patio wall, and they went inside the patio, where they found Marion and Barnhardt. She shook hands with Jimmy, who protested that he was better than he ever was. Barnhardt looked him over coldly, but no one bothered to introduce them.

"I'm looking for a job," laughed Jimmy. "I told Mr. Bonnette that I was going to offer my services to you, and he said it would be all right with him. He was very nice about it."

"He knows the salary," said Hashknife. "We split it three ways."

"Well, that's mighty nice of you, Jimmy," said Marion.

"Don't mention it, Marion."

Barnhardt cleared his throat raspingly. He wanted to voice an objection, but had none. Hashknife's eyes were smiling, but his mouth was serious, as he watched the lawyer's face.

"I think we are being well taken care of, Mr. Barnhardt," said Marion, her eyes dancing.

"Oh, hu—er—yes, indeed." Barnhardt mopped his face with a silk handkerchief. "Very, very well, Miss Taylor. I—I guess I will be going along."

"Come again," said Hashknife cordially.

Barnhardt flashed a glance at him, as he held out his hand to Marion.

They walked to the patio gate and watched Barnhardt ride away, sitting stiffly in his saddle, his horse trotting, every jerk of which drew Barnhardt's trousers up nearer his knees, and caused his ill-fitting sombrero to shift from side to side.

"Looks like the joker in a deck of playin'-cards," observed Sleepy.

"He means well, I think," said Marion, as they turned back.

"Means well to Lee Barnhardt," smiled Hashknife.

"I don't like him," said Jimmy. "Oh, it isn't because of anything he has ever done to me," he hastened to say. "But it is just something about him that—well, I don't like him."

"Shall we show our new member to the bunk-house?" asked Hashknife. "I like him a lot better, since I've heard he don't like lawyers."

"Oh, my remark does not cover the entire profession," said Jimmy quickly.

Marion laughed and went into the house, while Hashknife and Sleepy introduced Jimmy to the bunk-house. They sat down and rolled cigarets. Jimmy was not very adept, but he managed to make his own smoke.

"You know Miss Taylor pretty well, don'tcha?" asked Hashknife.

Jimmy colored quickly.

"Well, not awful well."

"Well enough to call her Marion."

"She asked me to call her that. But that's all right, isn't it?"

"It's all right with me. But it got under the hide of that lawyer."

"It's none of his business."

"No-o-o, I suppose not, Jimmy. Have you any idea who shot yuh?"

Jimmy started to speak, changed his mind, and shook his head.

"I heard," said Hashknife slowly, "that two prominent young men in this community had declared their intentions of marryin' this young lady."

"Oh, I know that," said Jimmy quickly. "Tex Alden and Chet Le Moyne. But that doesn't make any difference to me."

"I see," Hashknife grinned widely. "You'll make it a three-cornered affair, eh?"

"Not at all. You see, I—I hardly know the lady. She was nice to me, and I appreciate it. But I never said I wanted to marry her."

"You've met Chet Le Moyne?"

"Yes, I've met him. We were introduced at the Oasis saloon."

"Where did you meet Tex Alden?"

"I never was introduced to him, but I—I talked to him here."

"Yeah? And he told yuh to keep away, didn't he?"

Jimmy looked at Hashknife in amazement.

"Why, how did you know that?"

"I didn't," smiled Hashknife. "I knew you'd correct me, if I was wrong."

Jimmy rubbed his nose and grinned foolishly.

"That's one way of finding out, I suppose. Yes, he did tell me to keep away from here."

"And that night you got shot."

"Gee! Do you think he shot me?"

Hashknife smiled softly over the manufacture of another cigaret, but did not answer.

"What do you think I ought to do?" queried Jimmy.

"Just forget it," replied Hashknife. "You don't know anything about it, Jimmy."

"I know, but—" Jimmy hesitated awkwardly. "But he—whoever fired that shot—wanted to kill me, didn't they? Don't you suppose they'll try again?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Gee, that puts me in a fine position!"

"Yea-a-ah, it does. You ought to grab a train and high-tail it out of this country."

Jimmy thought it over seriously, the smoke from his cigaret drifting up into his eyes.

"No," he said finally, "I won't go. I've never injured any one, and I'm not going to run away."

"And take chances on bein' killed?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Yes; it's all right. I might be lucky."

Hashknife held out his hand to Jimmy, as he said,

"Young man, you belong. I wouldn't blame yuh if yuh ran away. We're just a pair of ordinary human beings, but we're backin' yore play."

"Gee, that's nice of you! I'm not much good—not alone. I didn't come here with the idea of becoming a gunman, but I wish somebody would show me something about a revolver. It tries to jump out of my hand every time I shoot it, and I can't hit a five-gallon can at ten feet. Really, a fellow should know something about a gun—if somebody is trying to kill him."

"It might come in handy," smiled Hashknife. "Neither of us are good shots, but we can show you how to point a gun."

"Fine! And to draw one real fast, like Johnny Grant can?"

"I've never seen Johnny Grant draw a gun. I've found that it isn't all in the speed. Too much speed wastes the first shot. Never reach for a gun, unless you mean to use it, and when you do reach, draw and shoot deliberately. Split-second gunmen don't hit anythin'. And another thing, Jimmy—don't shoot, unless yo're in the right. Bein' right to start with will win nine times out of ten. You know it and the other man knows it."

"I think I know what you mean, Mr. Hartley."

"I'm glad yuh do—and my name's Hashknife—to them that belong."

Jimmy grinned widely. It was the first time that any one had even intimated that he might "belong," and his heart filled with gratitude toward this tall, serious-faced cowboy, who had admitted him to the brotherhood of cowpunchers.

"But you'll never make a cowpuncher out of yourself, by gettin' pitched off every bronc yuh see," declared Sleepy. "Bein' a cow-hand don't necessarily mean that yuh can ride anythin' that wears hair.

Nobody's goin' to blame yuh, if yuh don't ride bad ones. That's only a small part of the business—the fool part, Jimmy."

"I suppose you're right," admitted Jimmy. "I wasn't born to ride buckers. I was just wondering how you two men happened to be cowboys."

"Circumstance, I reckon," said Hashknife. "I was born on the Milk River, in Montana. My dad was a preacher, Jimmy. Not the kind of a preacher you've known. He wore overalls and boots, and when he wasn't ridin' from place to place, packin' his gospel, he was workin' like —— at somethin' else to make a livin' for the family, because preachin' didn't pay dividends.

"There was six of us kids, and I was the oldest; which meant that I was shiftin' for myself when I was twelve. I naturally didn't get over-educated. But I competed against men, and they taught me things. There wasn't anythin' to do in that country, except punchin' cows; so I naturally learned the business.

"In fact, I was about eighteen years old before I knew there was anythin' else in the world. Then I started driftin', learnin', and fightin' my way. I got whipped a lot of times, but I learned a lot of things; some of it from books, but a lot more from humanity. It's been a hard school, Jimmy—and it still is; a school where yuh never graduate."

"I never thought of the world in that way, Hashknife."

"That's the way she is," declared Sleepy. "I got off in about the same way Hashknife did. My folks wanted to honor Idaho; so they moved over near Pocatello before I was born. I went to school, when they could find a man who was brave enough to teach the risin' sons—which wasn't no ways regular. The last teacher we had was a horse-thief, and he almost got me mixed up with him in a deal.

"I jist kinda growed up, got some wild-eyed ideas, and follered a bunch of geese South. I had a lot of corners on me, and inside of three years I had 'em all knocked off. In three years more I had hollers where there used to be bumps. About that time I decided that there was a —— of a lot of other folks in the world; so I sawed off my horns and held my elbows close to my sides, when I went through a crowd. I eventually drifted to the Hashknife outfit, where I finds my pardner. I dunno just how or why he picked up with me, but we've been together ever since."

"I felt sorry for yuh," said Hashknife solemnly.

"Yeah, and I've felt sorry for myself ever since."

From out in the patio came the raucous bray of Apollo, as if he had joined the laugh. The three men sauntered out into the patio, where Apollo was nosing around in a water-bucket. He looked them over suspiciously and angled crab-wise toward Sleepy, who was wise in the ways of a burro.

"Git away from me, yuh —— relic!" snorted Sleepy, slapping at the burro with his hat. Marion came from the house, laughing at Sleepy's antics, and they grouped together at the well.

"Apollo is a family heirloom," laughed Marion. "No man knows his age. The Indians say he was here when they came, and he has never grown old, except in appearance."

Marion put one arm over the burro's neck and rubbed his nose with her hand.

"He loves me," she said.

"And I heard a man say once that a burro didn't have any sense," smiled Hashknife.

Marion colored slightly.

"They're the wisest of animals," declared Sleepy.

Came the sharp thud of a blow, as if something had struck the burro with a heavy impact, and the ancient animal dropped as if its legs had been suddenly yanked from under its body. In fact, its fall was so sudden that Marion jerked forward, lost her balance, and fell sprawling across its neck.

And as she fell, from somewhere back in the hills, came the report of a rifle shot. It was so sudden, so unexpected, that no one moved for a moment. Then Hashknife flung himself forward, grasped Marion in his arms and ran back to the shelter of the bunk-house, with Sleepy and Jimmy following.

They stopped against the bunk-house door, staring at each other. Marion was dazed but unhurt.

"What was it?" she asked.

"Yo're not hurt?" asked Hashknife anxiously.

"I'm not hurt. I—I just fell down. But what—"

"Good gosh, that sure was a close one!" exclaimed Sleepy. "Some dirty coyote—"

"Shot at me," finished Jimmy nervously. "That bullet went past my ear—I felt it."

"But—but—" faltered Marion.

"Stay where yuh are," cautioned Hashknife.

He ran into the bunk-house, and came out in a minute, stuffing cartridges into the loading-gate of one of the ranch rifles.

"Oh, be careful about showing yourself," cautioned Marion.

"Thanks," grinned Hashknife.

He moved along the patio wall, slipped out through the gate, while Sleepy took a rifle from the bunk-house, swearing disgustedly over the fact that Hashknife had taken all the cartridges.

"It came from the hill back of us," said Marion. "Poor old Apollo!"

"Yeah, he's a goner," said Sleepy softly. "Well, that's about all yuh ever could do to make him die. If old age was ever goin' to kill him, he'd 'a' died forty years ago."

There were tears in Marion's eyes as she looked at the sprawling figure of the ancient burro. Worse than useless, he had always been a part of the Double Bar 8. It was the razing of a landmark.

Suddenly the ancient one shuddered, lifted its misshapen head and goggled foolishly. Then it got slowly to unsteady legs, staggered a few feet, thrust out its head, opened a cavernous mouth, which showed a few crooked teeth, and brayed defiance to all rifle-shooting bushwhackers.

"My ——!" snorted Sleepy. "A rifle can't even kill it!"

Marion was laughing and crying alternately, and Sleepy grasped her by the arm to prevent her from going out to the burro.

"It just creased him," explained Sleepy. "See where that blood streak runs down his neck? That bullet went through his neck just over the vertebræ, knocked him plumb out for a while, but he's as good as ever now."

Apollo looked reproachfully at Sleepy, stretched his neck tentatively and moved over to the shade of the wall, evidently none the worse for his experience.

When Hashknife left the patio gate he hugged the wall, circling to the rear of the bunk-house, from where he ran to the stable. He decided that the shot had been fired from a point on the hill, near the upper end of a small cañon. It was about the only spot on that side where a man could get elevation enough to enable him to see the center of the patio.

There was plenty of brush on the slope behind the stable; brush tall enough to conceal him from any one on the slope; so Hashknife did not hesitate to head directly for the spot he had in mind. There was no more shooting, but Hashknife could not be sure that the bushwhacker had not seen him start from the patio; so when he was half-way up to the break of the cañon, he went carefully, taking advantage of the heaviest cover in sight.

Hashknife realized his own danger. It was almost impossible for him to move without making a noise in the dry brush. And he did not know what moment a bullet might search him out. Working to the right, he came to the cañon-rim, where he sprawled under a bush, listening closely.

Near him a flock of quail scurried about in the brush, their peculiar call, ventriloquistic, "Sit right there!" echoing back from the cañon-walls. One of them passed within inches of his rifle muzzle, a nervously jerking handful of blue and bronze, evidently puzzled at this sprawled figure of a human, which did not move.

The quail were working up the slope. Peering beneath the brush, Hashknife could see the little blue fellows running from cover to cover, while their calling became more faint. Hashknife slid farther out on the rim, and was about to get to his feet, when he saw the flock of quail whir up from the brush, and come hurtling down the cañon, swinging in below him, scattering badly, and beginning their warning cries again.

Something or somebody had disturbed them. Then he heard the sound of something coming down through the brush toward him. He got to his haunches, swinging his rifle into position as a horse and rider broke through the brush, almost against him.

The black horse snorted wildly, as Hashknife arose, covering the rider with the rifle. The man jerked back and his hands went above his head, while the horse surged back. The rider was of medium height, slightly gray, his bronzed face heavily lined, one cheek bulged with a chew of tobacco. He quieted the horse, spat explosively and shut one eye as he looked down at Hashknife.

"Well?" he said rather defiantly.

"Not so well," said Hashknife coldly. He circled the horse, but there was no rifle in sight.

"What's the idea?" queried the man.

"That's what I want to know. Who are you, pardner?"

"M' name's Goode. G-o-o-d-e. Called 'Plenty.' "

"Yeah? Good rifle shot?"

"Fair."

"Uh-huh," Hashknife considered Mr. Goode. He was not a soft-looking person.

"Of course, it's none of my business, but I'm just curious to know who, or which one of us, you tried to kill a while ago, Mr. Goode?"

"Me?" Goode spat thoughtfully. "That's a queer question, my friend with the cocked Winchester. 'S far as I remember, I ain't tried to kill anybody for a long time."

"No-o-o-o?" drawled Hashknife. "I hate to call a man a liar."

"Prob'ly," dryly. "I hate to be called one, when I've got my hands in the air."

"Sure. Yuh might care to tell me how yuh happen to be right here about this time."

"Cinch. I'm from the X Bar 6 outfit. Me and Ed Gast was back toward Yaller Horn Mesa today, and when we're on our way back I decides to ride down to the Double Bar 8. Ed went on to Blue Wells; so I cuts a straight line for here. Satisfied?"

"But not contented," said Hashknife. "Just why didja want to come to the Double Bar 8? You know —— well the three men from that ranch are in jail at Blue Wells."

"Oh, I knowed that all right. But I wanted to get a look at the two men who are runnin' the place."

"Get a look at 'em, eh?"

Goode grinned widely, showing his tobacco-stained teeth.

"I reckon yo're one of 'em, stranger. Yuh see, I lived at Black Wells when you and yore pardner cleaned up the Modoc trouble, and I heard a lot about yuh. I've always wanted to thank yore pardner for killin' Jud Mahley. It saved me a ca'tridge."

Hashknife studied the face of the ex-Black Wells cowboy, but the man seemed sincere.

"I want to believe yuh, Goode. But a while ago somebody fired a rifle up here, and the bullet almost killed a woman in the Double Bar 8 patio."

Goode's eyes narrowed.

"And yuh thought I done it, Hartley?"

"I found yuh here."

"Yeah, that's true. I heard the shot. It wasn't long ago. But a shot don't mean anythin'. I scared up a flock of quail back there on the hill, and I jist wondered if somebody hadn't been out tryin' to get a meal of 'em."

Hashknife lowered his gun and let down the hammer.

"I'm takin' you at yore word, Goode," he said. "There's got to be a reason for that shot—and I don't reckon you've got one."

"Well, I sure ain't, Hartley. Any old time I go bushwhackin', it won't be you, nor any of yore friends."

"Well, that's sure thoughtful of yuh. Do yuh know Miss Taylor?"

"Know who she is. Tex Alden intended to send me and one of the other boys down here to run this ranch, but when you boys took it, I reckon he changed his mind."

"It didn't make him mad, did it, Goode?"

Goode looked curiously at Hashknife, his lips pursed thoughtfully.

"Well, it hadn't ought to," he said slowly.

Hashknife nodded. He liked Goode for that remark.

"We might as well go down to the ranch-house," suggested Hashknife. "I reckon the shootin' is all over."

"I hope t' gosh it is, Hartley. That's nasty business."

They went to the ranch-house, where Hashknife introduced Goode to Sleepy and Jimmy. Marion had gone into the house, but came out a few minutes later and was introduced. Hashknife explained how he had met Goode.

It was possibly a half an hour later that Goode rode away. His explanation of how he happened to be there on the hill so soon after the shooting did not satisfy Sleepy.

"That jigger's eyes are hard," declared Sleepy. "Jist like moss-agate. And he's from Black Wells, Hashknife."

"I *sabe* that," smiled Hashknife. "But I don't think he did fire that shot. He don't look like a hired killer, and it's a cinch he ain't got no personal reason for killin' any of us."

"Ain't he?" Sleepy smiled wisely. "Just

suppose Mr. Goode is one of that gang of train robbers? He knows what we done in the Modoc country. Figure it out for yourself."

Hashknife nodded seriously.

"Yeah, that might be true. Mebbe he thinks we're here to work on that case. I hate to get fooled on humanity, Sleepy. That feller may be awful slick. He's either innocent, or smooth as satin, because he sure had an alibi on the end of his tongue."

"But he didn't have any rifle," said Jimmy.

"A rifle is easy to hide," said Sleepy, shaking his head. "Nossir, I'd look out for Mr. Goode."

"But that shot was fired at me." Jimmy was not to be denied of his thrill. "It went right past my ear."

"And why would Goode shoot at Jimmy?" questioned Marion.

Hashknife laughed and picked some of the burrs off his knees.

"We've got to get an answer-book, folks. I'm glad that the heirloom was only creased. But from now on we've got to be mighty careful. Unless I'm mistaken, that shot was only a beginnin'."

"Do you think you ought to stay here?" asked Marion nervously. "I mean, to take a chance on your lives, just to help me out?"

Hashknife looked at Jimmy, who dug his heel savagely in the hard ground, appearing ill at ease. Finally he looked up, noticing that both Hashknife and Sleepy were waiting for him to answer Marion's question.

"Well," he said, "as far as I'm concerned, I'll stay."

"Three times—and out," said Hashknife softly. "They've tried twice, Jimmy."

"I know," seriously. "But," he grinned and peeled some sunburn off his nose, "I'm beginnin' to think that you never will die until your time comes."

"And that thought will sure help yuh win a lot of fights where the odds are all against yuh, Jimmy," said Hashknife.

"Are you a fatalist?" asked Marion.

"Well," grinned Hashknife, "if I wasn't, I'd 'a' been scared to death years ago."

"I would like to hear about that Modoc affair," said Jimmy.

Hashknife shook his head quickly.

"No, Jimmy. It wasn't anything. Goode kinda got things twisted. I hope Carrie Nation gets some food on the table pretty soon."

It was like Hashknife to refuse to tell of things they had done. After he and Sleepy Stevens had joined forces and left the Hashknife outfit, fate seemed to throw them into troubled waters. Hashknife was either blessed or cursed with an analytical mind. A range mystery was food and drink to him. Sleepy's mind ran in normal channels, but he loved to roam, and his love of adventure, fearlessness in the face of danger, made him a valuable ally to Hashknife.

So for a number of years their trail had led them where the cattle roamed, working on mysteries; more often than not, working for the sheer love of the thing, rather than for pay. At times they had stepped out of a pall of powder smoke, mounted their horses and rode away ahead of the thanks of those whose future had been made more bright by their coming.

"Soldiers of fortune," a man had called them.

"Cowpunchers of disaster," corrected Hashknife.

And in all their wanderings, the thing uppermost in their minds was to find the spot where they might be satisfied to settle down and live a peaceful life; both of them realizing all the while that they would never be satisfied with peace. Always the other side of the hill called to them—the irresistible call of the open, of the strange places, which is always answered by men who can't sit still.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHERIFF WONDERS

AFTER Goode rode back to Blue Wells he met Lee Barnhardt, who was taking a drink at the Oasis, and Goode, who was also drinking, told him of his visit to the Double Bar 8, and of the mysterious shot. The lawyer was naturally interested and questioned Goode closely, but Goode knew nothing of who had fired the shot.

"I met Hartley and Stevens," offered Goode. "They're the same two jiggers that cleaned up that Modoc job."

"Detectives?" asked Barnhardt.

"Oh, I dunno about that part of it. But

that ain't the only job they ever cleaned up. There's a lot more behind that one, and I'll betcha they've not been idle since then. I'm wonderin' what they're doin' here."

"Perhaps they're working on that train robbery."

"Pshaw, that might be it. I'll buy a drink, Barnhardt."

On his way back to the office Barnhardt met Le Moyne.

"What ever happened to that detective the Santa Rita was going to put on that robbery?" asked Barnhardt.

Le Moyne smiled.

"Why, I guess the company didn't think it was worth while, as long as you folks had jailed some one for doing the job."

Barnhardt laughed softly, knowingly.

"That's all right, Chet. But when you hire detectives, why don't you get men whose reputations are not so well known?"

Le Moyne looked him over coldly.

"What do you mean, Lee?"

"Oh, I respect your secrecy. But really, Hartley and Stevens are too well known to do much good."

"Eh?" Le Moyne frowned heavily. "Those two men at the Taylor ranch?"

"Sure. The two best man hunters you could have hired. But it's a case of them being too well known."

"Yeah?" Le Moyne smiled thinly. "Too well known, eh? But don't blame me—I'm not the Santa Rita company."

"That's true."

"Personally, I know nothing about their reputation, Lee."

"You don't? Well, I don't know very much, but I do know that they've never lost a case. I'd hate to have them on my trail."

"Well," Le Moyne shrugged his shapely shoulders, "it seems as though we had hired two very good men, Lee."

"You have." Barnhardt laughed and grew confidential. "Tex Alden is as sore as a boil. He didn't want them two men to stay at the ranch. He intended to run the ranch himself."

"He did, eh?" Le Moyne scowled. "Yeah, I suppose he would. I'm glad he missed out on that. And I'm glad the sheriff and the railroad detective had to make that arrest. It rather lets me out of any blame in the matter, you see."

"Certainly."

"They've got plenty of help at the Double Bar 8," said Barnhardt, after a pause. "That tenderfoot, Jimmy Legg, who was at the AK ranch, has volunteered his services. Tex sure is sore at him."

"Sore at Legg? What for?"

"Well, Tex thinks Marion pays too much attention to Legg."

"Well, does she?"

"I don't know, Chet. She calls him Jimmy, and he calls her Marion."

"Does, eh? Say, Lee, where did that fellow come from?"

"Nobody seems to know. He tramped in here the night of the hold-up. He said the train passed him. I can't quite figure him out. I've talked with Scotty Olson and Al Porter about him, and they're not quite sure what he is. He's not a bad looking fellow, and I think he has a way with women."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, you know, Chet; sort of a way of talking."

"Yea-a-ah, I guess I know what you mean," sighed Le Moyne. "I'll see you later, Lee."

Barnhardt went back to his office, glowing with the self satisfaction that comes to men who love to gossip. Le Moyne met Goode at the Oasis, and Goode was carrying just a little too much liquor. Goode happened to be extolling Hashknife and Sleepy to the bartender, who evidently didn't care a bit about it.

"I tell yuh, they're invin-shi-ble," he declared. "Bes' pair of two-handed fighters on earth. Betcha odds, tha's what'll do."

"Hello, Plenty," said Le Moyne.

Goode goggled at Le Moyne.

"Howza paymashter? Whatcha usin' f'r money these days, Chet?"

"Good yellow gold, Plenty. What do you want to bet on?"

"Don't get him started," advised the bartender. "He's drunk. Wants to bet odds that Hartley and Stevens will find the men who robbed your pay-roll."

Le Moyne laughed and bought a drink for every one at the bar.

"I'm tellin' yuh," declared Goode. " 'F they was after me, I'd run like ——, and pray every jump."

"Bad men, eh?" asked Le Moyne, laughing.

"Wors' you ever sheen! Gun-shootin' mind-readers. Yesshir. Oh, you'll shee."

He pointed a wavering finger in the direction of the bartender.

"Betcha oddsh. Betcha anythin'—"

Goode waved his arm, as if to encompass everything, and sat down on the bar-rail, where he began snoring.

"Can't stand much," said the bartender. "Give him ten drinks of hooch, and he's plumb gone. Know anythin' about Hartley and Stevens?"

Le Moyne smiled and his brows lifted slightly.

"You knew the Santa Rita had detectives on the case, didn't you?"

"Oh, I did hear they was goin' to. What'll yuh drink, Chet?"

"Same thing. I wonder where Goode found out so much about those two men?"

"I don't know. He's been out to the Double Bar 8 to see 'em, and when he came back he met Al Porter here. They had a few shots of hooch, and Goode told Al all about 'em. The more drinks he took, the more he told. After Al went away, Barnhardt came in, and Goode told it all over again. When Barnhardt went out, I was the victim. You're lucky he went to sleep."

"I suppose I am," laughed Le Moyne. "It appears that the Double Bar 8 is well taken care of right now. Did any one find out who shot that tenderfoot kid the other night?"

"Never tried to, I reckon. The kid went back to the AK."

"He's over at the Taylor place now."

"Is that so?"

"That's what I heard."

"Oh, sure; I heard that too. You heard about somebody takin' a shot at the gang at the Double Bar 8, didn't yuh?"

Le Moyne hadn't; so the bartender told him what he had heard Goode tell Barnhardt. It was interesting to Le Moyne, inasmuch as the bullet nearly struck Marion.

"That sure beats ——!" snorted Le Moyne. "What kind of a country is this getting to be? I wonder," he squinted thoughtfully, "if that shot was fired at Legg, the tenderfoot?"

"Might have been. What'll yuh have, Chet?"

"Nothing; I've had enough."

Le Moyne turned his back to the bar, while he rolled and lighted a cigaret, his eyes thoughtful. Scotty Olson came in and spoke to Le Moyne as he walked past, but the handsome paymaster of the Santa Rita did not reply. Finally he walked out, mounted his horse and rode away.

The sheriff came back to the bar.

"What's the matter with Le Moyne?" he asked of the bartender.

"I dunno." The bartender rested his elbows on the bar, chewing on his cigar. "I told him about the bushwhacker out at the Double Bar 8 almost killin' Marion Taylor, and I suppose Le Moyne is sore about it."

"Al Porter was tellin' me about it," nodded the sheriff. "I don't *sabe* it."

"You'd be a wonder if yuh did, Scotty. This country is getting pretty salty, don't-cha know it? First a train robbery, then an attempted murder on the main street, and now they're shootin' from the hills."

"And what for?" wailed the sheriff. "My ——, I do hate a mystery!"

"Sure yuh do, Scotty. What'll yuh drink? See-gar? Sure. These ought to be good. Paid five dollars for that box of 'em three years ago. Pretty dry? Well, my ——, you'd be dry, too, if yuh was kept in a box in Arizona for three years. What-cha suppose anybody's tryin' to kill off Legg for?"

"I didn't know they was."

"Somebody shot at him the other night, didn't they? And Goode says that shot was fired at him today."

"He ought to go away," said Scotty, looking gloomily at his cigar, which seemed to be trying to expand into a rose, or a cabbage.

He flung it in a cuspidor, and smoothed his huge mustache.

"We never had no trouble around here until he came," said Scotty. "He's a hoodoo, that —— tenderfoot!"

"How's that dog comin' along, Scotty?"

"First class. It bit me once, and Al Porter twice."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha! Don't like officers, eh?"

"Takes after his owner, I reckon. Gimme somethin' to take the taste of that cigar out of my mouth."

The sheriff drank a glass of liquor and scowled at Plenty Goode, who still sat on the bar-rail, snoring blissfully.

"Don't wake him up," pleaded the bartender. "When that jigger gets on one subject, he never knows when to quit."

"I ain't goin' to wake him up," wearily. "I suppose I'd better go out to the Double Bar 8 and investigate that shooting. It won't do no good, though. I've got more prisoners now than I know what to do with. Three of 'em—and a —— dog! I wish I wasn't the sheriff."

"Well, cheer up, Scotty; somebody will prob'ly kill yuh very soon, and then yore troubles will all be over."

"I s'pose that's true."

The sheriff went back to his office, where he found Porter cleaning a Winchester.

"Hear anythin' new?" growled Porter.

"No. Reckon there's any use investigatin' that shootin' at the Taylor ranch?"

Porter inserted a piece of white paper in the breech of the rifle, and squinted down the barrel.

"With two of the smartest detectives already there?" he replied. "You'd find out a —— of a lot, wouldn't yuh?"

"Mebbe that's right. I understand they're hired by Le Moyne, or by the Santa Rita mine."

"Mm-m-m-m-m," Porter reached for the oil-can and proceeded to lubricate the mechanism.

"I dunno how a detective can ever find out who held up that train, if he spends all his time runnin' a ranch," said the sheriff.

"Not bein' a detective, I don't know," said Porter coldly. "And what's a lot more I don't care a ——!"

CHAPTER XII

JIMMY TAKES A SHOT

FOR the next three days nothing startling happened at the Double Bar 8, except that Jimmy Legg labored hard with the intricacies of a rope, which invariably tangled around his legs, and a six-shooter, which seemed to ignore the target entirely.

Hashknife and Sleepy humped against the patio wall, absorbing many cigarets, while they solemnly gave advice to Jimmy, and marveled that any man could shoot away so much ammunition and never hit anything.

But Jimmy was persistent. He banged away merrily, satisfied if his bullet came within two feet of a tomato-can, at twenty feet, trying to follow Hashknife's advice to shoot low. Apollo, the burro, entirely recovered from his creasing, humped back in the shade of the patio wall, and watched Jimmy with solemn dignity, jerking his one good ear convulsively at each report of the heavy Colt.

Nanah had watched with interest from the door of the ranch-house, until a misdirected bullet smashed through a window near her, after which she lost interest in Jimmy's marksmanship.

Hashknife and Sleepy rounded up several head of Double Bar 8 horses, getting Marion's opinion on them as a remuda for the coming round-up, and also trying them out. As a result, both of the cowboys were stiff and sore from the unaccustomed shaking which is usually meted out to a rider by horses which have not been ridden for months. Jimmy Legg had tried one, and then retired to the liniment bottle.

Marion decided to ride to Blue Wells, and Jimmy immediately offered to ride with her. Jimmy had not been away from the ranch since the mysterious bullet had nearly robbed him of an ear, and he was anxious to go to town. Regardless of the fact that his torn scalp had not been dressed by a doctor, it was doing very nicely, and he was able to do away with the bandage.

He and Marion did not indulge in much conversation on the way to Blue Wells, because of the fact that most of Jimmy's time was occupied in handling his mount.

"This is rather embarrassing," he told Marion. "I start to say something to you, when this fool horse goes off across the country. I'd rather be thrown off than to have my conversation interrupted every time."

"But you're learning," declared Marion.

"I hope so," dubiously.

"Jimmy, does it mean so much to you—to be a cowboy?"

Jimmy reined his horse back into the road, clutched his hat just in time to save it, and nodded violently.

"You bet! Say, it means an awful lot to me, Marion. Darn it, the more I think about it, the more it means."

Marion did not question him any further, as they rode down the main street of Blue Wells. Marion dismounted at the sheriff's office, but Jimmy rode on to the Oasis hitch-rack, where he had seen several AK horses tied.

At the Oasis bar he found Johnny Grant, Eskimo Swensen, Oyster Shell and Tex Alden. Johnny fell upon him with a war-whoop of joy and dragged him to the bar, while Eskimo and Oyster pounded him on the shoulders and examined his scalp, much in the way of a pair of monkeys, gibbering the while.

Tex turned away without speaking and walked outside, while the AK gang leaned Johnny against the bar and demanded loudly of the bartender that he work fast. They questioned Jimmy about the shooting at the Double Bar 8, and his progress as a cowpuncher. In fact, the questions came too fast for Jimmy to answer. But after the second drink he managed to catch his breath, and told them some of the happenings. But he would not drink any more.

"I've got to ride back to the ranch," he told them solemnly. "I brought Miss Taylor to town, and she is down at the jail, visiting with her folks."

The two drinks had made Jimmy rather expansive and he told them about his roping and shooting lessons; which caused the AK boys to double up with mirth.

"We was goin' to stop at yore place on the way back," said Johnny Grant. "Bonnette said to tell Miss Taylor that her outfit can use from our wagons. There's plenty of room for all the bed-rolls, and three extra men ain't goin' to kill off our cook."

"Well, that certainly is thoughtful of him," said Jimmy. "I know Miss Taylor will appreciate it."

"Aw, you better have one more drink," urged Eskimo. "One more won't hurt yuh none."

"Well," Jimmy smiled expansively," I suppose not. But I'll buy this one."

All of which was acceptable, as it had been long enough since pay-day to find the AK boys in financial straits. They drank a health to Jimmy, and all walked outside. The main street of Blue Wells drowsed in the afternoon sun. A few men humped in shady spots, whittling, discussing nothing much in particular. Even the horses at the hitch-racks drowsed.

Suddenly a commotion started at the sheriff's office. It was not a big commotion, but plainly audible on the silent street. A yellowish-red dog darted out of the office door, whirled around once, as if to get its bearings, and trotted up the street, looking back.

Out of the door came Al Porter. He had a heavy dish in his right hand. Only for a moment did he hesitate, and then started toward the dog, running stiffly, swearing. The dog was Geronimo, the Exhibit A, in the case of the State of Arizona versus the Taylor Outfit.

Running as fast as he was capable, Porter hurled the dish at the dog. But his aim was very faulty, which was attested to by a splintering of window-glass from the front of Louie Sing's restaurant.

The AK gang whooped with mirth. Jimmy Legg, forgetting that ownership of Geronimo might cause complications, ran across the street toward Porter, yelling at him to let the dog alone. Geronimo stopped in an angle between the end of a bench and the wall of Moon's store, and anxiously watched Porter, who had picked up several rocks about the size of eggs, and was preparing to bombard the dog.

Jimmy's three drinks had made him reckless.

"You let that dog alone!" yelped Jimmy.

He was about twenty feet away from the swearing, perspiring Porter, who paused long enough to consign Jimmy to a place which was even more arid than Death Valley.

"By ——, I'll learn that dog to bite me!" he roared. "I'll smash in his —— skull!"

The first rock struck the end of the bench and glanced into Geronimo, who yelped more from fright than actual distress.

"Stop that, you dirty coyote!" yelled Jimmy.

Porter let fly with another rock, which narrowly missed breaking one of the store windows, and whirled angrily toward Jimmy.

"Who's a coyote?" he snorted.

His right hand swung back to the butt of his gun. It is barely possible that Jimmy's three drinks had ruined his perspective, because he whipped out his gun and shot at Porter, almost before his hand swung away from his hip.

The enraged deputy was off balance, unprepared, his right foot lifted, as he had been following the swing of his throwing-arm. And at the crack of Jimmy's gun, his feet seemed to jerk from under him and he came down in the hard street with a crash.

Jimmy stood there in the street, dangling the gun in his hand, while Porter sprawled on his back, his knees jerking. The dog came running toward Jimmy, barking joyfully, and almost knocked Jimmy down.

"Good ——, go away!" panted Jimmy. "Gug-go away!"

The three boys from the AK ran past Jimmy, going straight to Porter. The sheriff and Marion were coming from the office, while it seemed to Jimmy that the rest of the world spewed out of every doorway. Then he lost his nerve. Whirling on his heel, he ran to the hitch-rack, mounted his horse and went flailing off down the street, followed by Geronimo, barking wildly.

Porter got slowly to his feet, holding one hand against his head, his face a mixture of anger and wonderment.

"Where'd he hit yuh?"

"What was the matter?"

"Who shot yuh?"

Questions were fired at Porter, who groaned dismally and shoved the anxious sheriff away.

"That —— fool!" quavered Porter. "Who'd ever think he'd shoot? I was plumb off balance—kinda on one heel—and his bullet—take a look at it."

Porter held up his foot and they beheld the reason for the deputy's sudden drop. The heavy bullet had smashed into the high heel, almost into the counter, and the impact had knocked Porter's sole prop from under him. And Porter had hit his head a resounding whack against the ground, which accounted for the fact that Porter stayed down a while.

"And he stole the dog!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"The dog stole him," amended Johnny Grant.

"I hope t' —— he keeps him!" groaned Porter. "I'm all through with that dog, evidence or no evidence."

"But we've got to have that dog, Al," insisted the sheriff. "That's our main evidence."

"Then you get him and do the feedin'. I never hired out as a —— menagerie keeper. He bit me on the wrist, and when I kicked at him, he bit me on the ankle and got loose."

Tex Alden was one of those who had come from Moon's store, and now he spoke to the sheriff:

"Just why did that dog pull out with Legg?"

"Why, I dunno, Tex," admitted the sheriff.

"Why did Legg defend the dog?"

The sheriff looked blankly around.

"I dunno that either, Tex."

"All right," Tex smiled crookedly and shrugged his shoulders. He looked at Marion, but did not speak, and turned away.

"What'll yuh do to that kid, Al?" asked one of the men.

"Do to him?" Porter took it under advisement. "I dunno. He might 'a' been right. I was so —— mad that I dunno just how things was."

"You reached back for a gun," reminded Eskimo, and the other three AK cowboys nodded in confirmation.

"Yuh did, Al," said Johnny.

"All right," nodded Porter. "Mebbe I did."

"And the kid thought yuh was goin' to draw on him," offered Oyster Shell.

"Well, what the —— is all the argument about?" snarled the deputy. "I'll admit he was right. But," Porter mustered a smile, "I hope that —— dog bites him when he gits off that horse."

All of which ended all arguments as far as the guilt or innocence of Jimmy Legg was concerned—although Jimmy Legg, running his horse back toward the Double Bar 8, considered himself a deep-dyed killer.

He imagined that a posse was already on his trail, and once he saw Geronimo far back in the road, just topping a rise, and his imagination conjured up a dozen armed men, hot on his trail. The shooting had made him cold sober, but the taste of liquor was still on his palate.

His future was indefinite, because his thoughts ran in circles. He could see the big deputy, lying flat in the street, his knees jerking. Everything else was blotted out by that picture. He tried to remember just why he had fired the shot, but it was like a half-forgotten dream—something that had happened long ago.

His horse was plastered with lather, when he rode in at the patio gate and dismounted near the well. Hashknife and Sleepy were just coming from the ranch-house door, realizing from the condition of the horse that something was wrong.

"What's wrong, Jimmy?" asked Hashknife.

Jimmy flapped his arms weakly, and there was a decided catch in his throat.

"I just killed the deputy sheriff," he said.

Hashknife stepped closer and grasped Jimmy by a shoulder.

"You done what?"

Jimmy gulped and nodded.

"Ye-yes, I did. I—I—"

"Take it easy, kid," said Hashknife. "Set down here on the curb and tell us about it."

"I can't," Jimmy shook his head nervously. "I've got to keep going. They're after me, don't you see?"

"All right, kid. If they're after you, this is a fine place for 'em to get you."

"But I can't stay here, Hashknife."

"Sure yuh can, Jimmy. Let's talk it over. Runnin' away won't help yuh none. You'd lose out."

Geronimo came into the patio, dust-covered, his tongue hanging out, tail wagging. Jimmy had set a hot pace from town, but the dog had found him. He sat down on his haunches in front of Jimmy and put a paw on Jimmy's knee.

"Where'd the dog come from?" asked Sleepy.

Jimmy looked at Geronimo, and Geronimo looked at Jimmy.

"He is my dog," said Jimmy slowly. "It's the dog they had in jail—the evidence against Taylor."

"Your dog, Jimmy?" asked Hashknife.

"Oh, yes," Jimmy nodded slowly. "You see, I was afraid to tell anybody."

"All right," said Hashknife. "Now, tell us about the killin' of the deputy sheriff, Jimmy.'"

And Jimmy told them, while the two cowboys asked a question here and there to clarify things somewhat.

"Well, it looks to me as if it was a case of self-defense," said Hashknife, when Jimmy had finished his story.

"He really reached for his gun," said Jimmy. "I realized it."

"What I'd like to know is, how in —— did yuh ever hit him?" queried Sleepy.

"I—I suppose it was because he's larger than a tin can."

"Where do yuh reckon yuh hit him?"

"Oh, I don't know," wailed Jimmy. "It must have been through the heart, because he fell down so quickly—and his knees were jerking."

"That's good shootin', for the first time," said Sleepy dryly. "Where is Marion?"

"Oh, I forgot her! I must have been excited."

"You prob'ly would be," agreed Hashknife. "What I want you to do right now is to tell me all about ownin' this dog."

"Oh, yes, about the dog," Jimmy jerked nervously at the sound of a noise outside the patio gate, but it was only Apollo, rubbing his shoulder against the wall.

Jimmy sighed deeply.

"I suppose that was a dirty trick. But when I found out that—that the dog was supposed to belong to a robber, I was afraid to claim him. He ran away from me that night in Blue Wells, you see."

And then James Eaton Legg went ahead and told them about his experience with the express messenger. Hashknife grinned, when Jimmy told of that battle in the express car, and of how the messenger had described him as being a big, burly man, who tried to draw a gun.

"His lyin' saves you a lot of trouble," said Hashknife, when Jimmy had finished his tale. "He didn't want anybody to think he had been whipped by a smaller man."

"I suppose so; but I'll go to town and tell 'em that the dog belongs to me. I might as well shoulder it all now."

"I wish yuh wouldn't," said Hashknife. "Let things ride as they are for a while. If they arrest yuh for shootin' the deputy, mebbe yuh can make a self-defense out of it. Yuh say that the AK boys saw it? They'll prob'ly alibi yuh, 'cause they don't like the sheriff. Under the circumstances a man could lie a little and not bend his conscience too much."

"Yuh should have stayed and seen the finish," said Sleepy. "It would 'a' looked better."

"I know it," Jimmy sighed wearily. "But all I could think about was to run away. I've never killed a man before."

"Prob'ly the first time he ever was killed, too."

"Oh, don't joke about it! It's a terrible thing."

"Pshaw, I wasn't jokin', Jimmy."

"I know, but—"

A horse swung in through the patio gate, and Jimmy almost fell off the curb; but it was only Marion. She looked at Jimmy and began laughing. Geronimo barked joyfully and tried to jump up to her stirrup.

But Jimmy only stared at her blankly, his mouth open.

"What's the joke?" asked Hashknife seriously.

"Dud-don't laugh," pleaded Jimmy. "It isn't anything to laugh about."

Between chuckles of merriment Marion managed to tell them what Jimmy had done, while Jimmy, his eyes and mouth wide open, leaned against the curb, gasping like a fish out of water.

Marion described how Jimmy had ridden

out of Blue Wells, followed by the dog, and Sleepy cried against the shoulder of her horse. But Jimmy was too relieved to laugh.

"Well," he said solemnly, "I guess I'll have to pick something bigger than a man next time. Really, there should be something big enough for me to hit."

"You ought to attack a fort," laughed Sleepy.

They unsaddled Marion's horse, while Jimmy took care of his own exhausted mount. He was so happy that he tried to take the saddle off without uncinching it.

"I expect the sheriff will be out here soon," Marion told them. "He wants that dog. It bit Al Porter twice today, but they've got to keep it for evidence."

"They don't know it's here," said Hashknife. "Let's hide it."

"Hide it? But that wouldn't be lawful."

"It isn't lawful to hold yore folks on that kind of evidence, either. Where can we put the dog."

"In the cellar," suggested Sleepy. "The one beneath the kitchen."

"But won't they search?"

"Prob'ly. Put a rug over the trap-door, and they'll never see it."

It did not take them long to dump Geronimo into the cellar, where Sleepy made him a good bed and put in a bucket of water. The dog accepted his new quarters without any protest, and Nanah grinned when she put an old rug over the trap-door, and moved over a table to rest on it.

The three men were in the bunk-house when the sheriff showed up, about thirty minutes later. He looked around the patio, expecting to see the dog, and dismounted. Hashknife shook hands with him. Jimmy did not put in an appearance.

"You heard what happened in town, didn't yuh?" asked the sheriff. Hashknife agreed that he had.

"It ended all right," remarked the sheriff. "Except that the main exhibit of the Taylor case followed Legg out of town."

"What exhibit was that?"

"The dog. Legg came here, didn't he?"

"Oh, yeah. But I don't know anythin' about the dog. Jimmy said the trouble started over a dog, and Miss Taylor said the dog followed Jimmy out of Blue Wells, but it prob'ly went back."

"Yea-a-a-ah? Went back—where?"

"Why, to Blue Wells."

"I don't think so, Hartley."

"Didja search the town?"

The sheriff, of course, hadn't. He had taken it for granted that the dog followed Legg all the way to the Double Bar 8, and upon sober reflection on his part it was reasonable to suppose that the dog had stopped and turned back to town.

"The kid was kinda scared, wasn't he?" asked the sheriff.

"Naturally would be," grinned Hashknife. "He thought he had killed Porter."

"I dunno how he ever missed hittin' Al some'ers beside in the heel. They wasn't twenty feet apart. That derned tenderfoot is goin' to kill somebody before he gits through. He's comin' closer every time. By golly, I dodge every time I see him. He's such a bad shot that he worries me."

As they were laughing over Jimmy's markmanship, Lee Barnhardt rode in on his sway-backed mount and dismounted beside them.

"You rode too fast for me," he told the sheriff. "I saw you start out, but you didn't stop when I yelled."

"I didn't hear yuh, Lee."

Marion came from the house, and Barnhardt took some mail from his pocket, which he gave to her.

"The postmaster said you forgot to get it," he said. "I was coming out; so I brought it."

The mail consisted of a few circulars and a weekly newspaper.

"I asked for mail for you boys," Barnhardt told Hashknife.

"We're not likely to get any," smiled Hashknife. "Thank yuh just the same."

Barnhardt turned to the sheriff.

"What about that dog?"

"Not here. Mebbe it never left town, Lee. Yo're not worryin' are yuh?"

"Not me. I'd be just as well satisfied if it never came back."

"That's what I thought. Are yuh ready to ride back?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"I'm in no hurry, Scotty."

"Well, I am. So long, folks."

Jimmy ventured out after the sheriff had gone, and wanted to know everything the sheriff had said. He was so glad to know that the law was not on his trail that he even spoke pleasantly to Lee Barnhardt.

Marion went in the house, and Sleepy

sat down in the shade with Jimmy, leaving Hashknife with the lawyer.

"Naturally, we are both working in the interests of the Taylor family," said the lawyer confidentially. "Now, I'd like to know what progress you have made in your observations."

Hashknife looked at him keenly.

"I don't reckon I understand yuh, Barnhardt."

"No?" Barnhardt smiled knowingly. "For your own information I will say that Chet Le Moyne admitted your connections with the Santa Rita mining company."

"He did, eh?" Hashknife was wearing his poker face now.

"Yes. It is rather difficult to keep a thing like that from becoming common knowledge. Folks naturally wondered what your business might be."

"I suppose," seriously. "But I don't reckon it makes much difference, does it?"

"Oh, no. I have not mentioned it to any one; but I was curious to know what you had found out, because I am anxious for any new development which will serve my clients."

"Well, I can't tell yuh much. In fact, I can't tell yuh anythin'."

"Anything you told me would be in strictest confidence."

"Yeah, I realize that."

But although the Blue Wells lawyer waited patiently, the tall cowboy remained silent. Then—

"Just an inkling of what you are doing would serve to cheer up my clients."

Hashknife shifted his position and looked Barnhardt squarely in the eye. The level stare of the cold-eyed cowboy caused Barnhardt's gaze to shift. He had the uncomfortable feeling that Hashknife could read his mind.

"Barnhardt," said Hashknife earnestly, "do you think I'm a —— fool?"

"Oh, no; not at all. Well," Barnhardt turned away, "I suppose I may as well go back. No hard feelings, I hope. Being in charge of the Taylor defense, I would naturally be interested in any new developmenst in the case."

Barnhardt mounted his sway-backed horse and rode away, his elbows flapping, his trouser-legs crawling up. About a mile from the Double Bar 8 he drew rein and let his horse walk slowly along the dusty road, while he took an envelope from his pocket. The flap had already been torn loose. He drew out the letter and perused it closely. The envelope, postmarked Chicago, was addressed to H. Hartley, Blue Wells, Arizona, and the letter read:

> Dear Sir: A wire from us to James Eaton Legg, San Francisco, California, brought a reply from his former place of residence to the effect that Mr. Legg had left there and had left his forwarding address as Blue Wells, Arizona. This may be a coincidence, or it may be because of some former information. Trusting that you will be able to furnish us with valuable information soon, we beg to remain,
>
> Sincerely yours,
> LEESOM & BRAND.

Barnhardt's lips were shut tightly and the muscles of his jaw bulged as he tore the letter into tiny fragments, swung his horse off the road and scattered the bits of paper into a mesquite tangle. He turned in his saddle and looked back toward the Double Bar 8, as he reined his horse back to the road.

"Hashknife Hartley," he said earnestly, "do you think I'm a —— fool?"

But whether Hashknife did, or didn't—Barnhardt had no way of knowing. He could only guess, and possibly he guessed wrong. At any rate he rode back to Blue Wells in a black frame of mind, and the first man he met was Chet Le Moyne.

"I've just been out to the Double Bar 8," he told Le Moyne. "And I had a talk with your detectives."

"You did, eh. What did they tell you?"

"That would be telling, Chet. I told them I knew they were working for the Santa Rita."

"Yeah?" coldly. "And then?"

"Oh, they didn't deny it. But I don't think they've found out very much."

"Possibly not."

Le Moyne watched Barnhardt ride down to his office, tie his horse, and go inside. The face of the handsome paymaster twisted angrily, as his gloomy eyes squinted against the sun.

"I wonder if Barnhardt is just a plain —— fool, or—"

Le Moyne shook his head and went on his way.

THAT evening Hashknife, Sleepy and Jimmy rode to Blue Wells. There were few people in town, and while Jimmy and Sleepy played pool at the Oasis saloon, Hashknife found the sheriff at his office. The sheriff was pleasant and curious, especially when Hashknife talked over with him the evidence in the Taylor case.

The subject of the AK boys' locking the sheriff in his own cell came up, and the sheriff explained that the reason no one discovered his plight was because Al Porter, the deputy, was at Encinas, visiting a girl, and did not get back until morning.

"Does that Santa Rita pay-roll come in at the same time every month?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno."

"They say that the paymaster always takes the money from here to the mine."

"I reckon he does."

"And somebody would have to know it was comin' that day."

"Oh, they must 'a' knowed about it, Hartley."

"How would Taylor have found it out?"

"That's hard to say. Chet Le Moyne, the paymaster, is kinda sweet on Miss Taylor, and—"

"And he might have told her, eh?"

"I don't say he did, Hartley."

"But for the sake of an argument, it could 'a' happened. She might 'a' mentioned the fact that Chet was comin' in to get the pay-roll, eh? Is that what yuh was thinkin'?"

"Mebbe." The sheriff did not want to commit himself.

"And this Le Moyne was at the depot to get the pay-roll?"

"Yeah. He was here earlier in the evenin', and somebody said he went out to see Miss Taylor."

"But he was at the depot to get the money, was he?"

"Yeah."

"And you think there was four men in on the deal?"

"Sure. The fourth one got on at Encinas. It was his job to put the messenger out of commission, I reckon."

"This happened out where the AK road turns off the Encinas road, near the railroad track, I understand. They cut the express car loose from the rest of the train, ran it up there, blew the safe and got the money. The engine crew say they had sort of a battle with 'em, after they left the car. Then the engine crew ran the engine and express car back to where they had cut loose from the rest of the train, picked it up and came on to Blue Wells. Is that it?"

"Yeah, that's what happened."

"This express messenger and the man who got on the car at Encinas fought in the car, but finally fell out. Do yuh know if this was before or after the train was cut in two?"

The sheriff cogitated deeply.

"I never did hear, but—say, it must 'a' been after the train was broken, because they picked up the messenger on their way to here. Yessir, it must 'a' been after they cut off the express car, because that messenger sure was picked up. He never walked to the train."

"The messenger described the man who fought him, didn't he?"

"Well, he said it was a big, husky sort of a feller. I don't think there's any question about him bein' one of the gang. He used that dog as a reason for gettin' on that car."

"They why did he walk to the scene of the robbery, take the dog from the express car and disappear?"

"Prob'ly scared that some one would recognize the dog?"

"The messenger and engine crew had already seen it. If it belonged to Taylor, do yuh reckon they'd take the dog back to their ranch, where any one could find it?"

The sheriff twisted his mustache thoughtfully. This was something he had not thought about.

"Anybody would recognize that dog," said Hashknife.

"Yore argument sounds pretty good," admitted the sheriff. "But it don't make much difference, because we can't find that dog. Al Porter is glad, I suppose. The darn thing hates him. Bit him every time it had a chance. Growls every time he shows up."

"You'll have to find the dog before the trial, won't yuh?"

"I s'pose the prosecutin' attorney will raise —— if it ain't here. Still, it's been identified; so that prob'ly won't make a lot of difference."

"What became of Wade, the railroad detective?"

"Oh, he went back. Yuh see, he decided that Taylor was guilty; so there wasn't anythin' more for him to do here."

Hashknife went back to the saloon, and they made it a three-handed game of pool. It was about nine o'clock when they decided to go back to the ranch, as there was no excitement at all in Blue Wells. The moonlight was so bright that, following

Hashknife's suggestion, they rode in single file, about fifty feet apart.

That shot from the hills had made Hashknife cautious, and he knew that three riders, bunched, would make an easy target in that moonlight. But their return was uneventful, except that there were no lights in the windows of the ranch-house.

"That sure looks all wrong," declared Hashknife.

"Mebbe not," said Sleepy. "Marion and Nanah might be enjoyin' the moonlight."

"They might, but we'll play safe by thinkin' they're not."

The three men dismounted a hundred yards from the house and went cautiously to the patio gate. There was not a sound. The rear of the ranch-house flung a long shadow across the patio. Hashknife watched and listened for a while, and then strode boldly inside. A door creaked, and they heard Marion's voice—

"Is that you, Hashknife?" she spoke softly.

"It sure is," replied Hashknife. "What's the matter?"

"Come here."

They went softly across the patio and up to the door, where she let them in. They could see the silhouette of Nanah against a window, where she was watching. Marion closed the door softly.

"There wasn't any light," said Hashknife.

"Nanah saw you leave your horses," said Marion. "She knew who it was. About half an hour ago Nanah and I were sitting on the back porch in the moonlight. It was wonderful out there, but it was getting cool; so we came in. There were no lamps lighted.

"And Nanah swears she saw a man looking in the window, where she is now. I told her she must be seeing things, but she persisted. So we did not light a lamp. We watched and watched, but the man did not come back. I went to the rear door and opened it a little. It squeaks a little, you know. Then I saw a man cross the patio. He was all humped up, and it seemed to me as though he had been looking in the window of the bunk-house. I can't be sure about it. I'm sure he did not suspect that I had seen him, because he stopped in the gateway for quite a while. Then he stepped into the shadow on the other side of the wall."

"How long ago was this?" asked Hashknife.

"Not over thirty minutes ago."

"He must have been lookin' for us," grinned Sleepy.

"And if he seen us sneak in here he'll know we're on to him," said Hashknife. "But we've got to take a chance. Come out on the porch. Tell Nanah to light the lamps."

The old Indian woman bustled around, lighting lamps, while the rest of them followed Hashknife to the rear porch.

"I'll go first," whispered Hashknife. "One man only makes one target. If the coast is clear, I'll whistle a tune, and Sleepy, you and Jimmy come over there."

Hashknife kept well in the shadow in crossing the patio, and in a minute or two he began whistling. Sleepy and Jimmy crossed to the bunk-house, where the door was open. Hashknife lighted the lamp, which was on a table about midway of the room.

Then he motioned Sleepy and Jimmy back to the doorway, where he followed them out, closing the door.

"Duck down as low as yuh can and sneak back to the house," he whispered. They got back to the house and crept silently in.

Hashknife stepped in close to a rear window, where he could get a clear view of the patio, and watched through a break in the curtain.

"If he didn't see our horses, he'll think we're in the bunk-house," said Hashknife. "If he seen us leave our horses and do an Injun sneak, he'll know we're on to him, and prob'ly fog away from here."

"Do you think it's the man who has been trying to kill me?" asked Jimmy.

"Might be."

Suddenly Hashknife jerked back. A blinding flash filled the room, followed by a terrific jarring crash, which fairly threw them off their feet. The lamp was extinguished; pictures fell from the walls, and a moment later the house seemed to be bombarded with missiles from every angle.

Hashknife had fallen back against a table, but now he got to his feet, groping in the dark. Sleepy was swearing dazedly. Dust and smoke eddied in through the broken windows, and with it was the odor of dynamite; the unmistakable scent of nitroglycerine.

"Is anybody hurt?" gasped Hashknife, scratching a match and holding it above his head. Nanah was sitting against the wall, her eyes goggling out of an impassive face. Marion had got to her feet and was reaching for something to steady herself with, while Jimmy had backed against the wall, his arms outspread against it, his feet braced.

"What was it?" whispered Marion, staring wide-eyed at Hashknife.

"Somebody dynamited us, I reckon." He strode to the door and flung it open, while the others crowded close behind him. Where once had stood the adobe bunk-house, there was only a pile of adobe bricks, twisted timbers. The patio was a mass of adobe. On the porch of the ranch-house was the splintered door, torn from its hinges and flung across the patio.

Hashknife ran across the yard, vaulted across the débris and went out through a gaping hole in the patio wall, heading for the stables. Through some freak of dynamite explosion, the force seemed to have been in the opposite direction to the stables, with the result that none of the stock was injured, and the stable still intact.

It did not take Hashknife long to find that nothing had been injured in the stable. A decidedly feminine shriek from the patio sent him running back through the broken wall, where he almost ran into Apollo, the ancient burro.

"He was under that pile of stuff," yelled Sleepy. "Rised up like a darned ghost and almost scared Marion to death."

Marion was laughing foolishly, almost hysterically.

"—— good thing I see man," declared Nanah solemnly.

"You bet it was!" agreed Hashknife warmly. "If yuh didn't see that man, we'd be in bad shape now, Nanah. Good gosh! Can yuh imagine what would 'a' happened to us, if we'd 'a' been in that bunk-house?"

"Yeah, and we'd better look a little out," said Sleepy nervously. "The little side-winder that touched off that blast will prob'ly want to see if he done a good job."

"He'll not come back tonight, Sleepy. He's high-tailin' it out of this section right now. I'll betcha yuh could hear that explosion in Blue Wells."

Marion shivered in the cold breeze, as she looked at the moonlit wreck.

"Oh, what will happen next?" she wondered aloud.

"Somebody," said Hashknife, "is goin' to hear the echo of that blast, and it sure is goin' to ache his ears."

They tried to find their bed-rolls, but the outer wall of the bunk-house, which was about two feet thick of adobe, had fallen in on the floor, and it would require much digging to get down even to the bunk-levels.

They went after their horses and put them in the stable, after which they borrowed a few blankets from Marion. Jimmy insisted that he be allowed to stand guard with them, but Hashknife decreed that Jimmy sleep in the house, while Sleepy rolled in his blankets at the hay-mow window of the stable, which, since the bunk-house was no more, gave him a fair view of the patio and rear of the house. Hashknife went out about a hundred feet from the front of the house, and coiled up in his blankets in the cover of a mesquite, where he could watch the front of the ranch-house. But nothing came, except the cold, gray dawn, which was a long time coming.

There was an exodus from Blue Wells, when the news of the dynamiting reached there, and the Double Bar 8 held a great gathering of the cattle-clan, who came to view the ruins and to give an opinion. Some of them seemed to think that perhaps Apostle Paul Taylor had had some dynamite stored in the bunk-house, and that it had exploded.

Tex Alden came and viewed the ruins with gloomy eyes; Barnhardt perched on a pile of adobe and crumbled the clay between his fingers, and looked wise. The sheriff talked to every one who seemed to have any kind of a theory—and knew no more about it than he did when he came.

The women grouped around Marion, and "Oh'd" and "Ah'd," like a lot of old hens clucking over a sudden fright. Hashknife said nothing, but listened much. Le Moyne came to him and tried to find out what Hashknife thought about it, but went away with the feeling that this tall cowboy knew less than any of them.

With Le Moyne was Dug Haley, who quarreled loudly with Al Porter over what dynamite would or would not do. Sleepy Stevens horned into the argument with a dissertation on "the dynamic principles of combustion," in which he used the words "epiglottis," "atomizer" and "dogmatic" numberless times; much to the confusion of Al Porter, who was forced to admit that all he knew about dynamite was that "the —— stuff busts and raises ——."

It was not often that Antelope Neal, owner of the Oasis, went out of Blue Wells, but he did ride down to see what had happened to the Double Bar 8. Neal was a small, gray-haired man, who seldom had anything to say. He was a square gambler, and was respected as such in Blue Wells.

Hashknife noticed that Tex Alden and Antelope Neal stood apart from the crowd for quite a while, talking confidentially, eying him at times, and causing Hashknife to suspect that he was the subject of their conversation.

When the crowd began to thin out, it seemed that Tex tried to start a conversation with Marion, but she evidently preferred the attention of Jimmy Legg, and Tex retired, his lips set in a thin line, his eyes hard and speculative.

Lee Barnhardt noticed that Marion had evaded Tex, and it seemed to amuse the Blue Wells attorney. He sidled in beside Tex, who paid no attention to him.

"Tex, you're not going to let a tenderfoot tramp cut you out, are you?" he asked, possibly trying to be sympathetic.

Tex's action was almost as sudden as dynamite. He hooked his right fist against Barnhardt's jaw, knocking him almost through the patio gate. Needless to say, Barnhardt stayed down. Tex stepped over to him, glanced down, turned to the crowd and studied them coldly. Then, without a word, he walked to his horse, mounted and rode away.

Several men ran to Barnhardt and tried to help him to his feet; but standing up was one thing that Barnhardt did not care about in the least. He sagged weakly, goggle-eyed.

"As cool as a cow-cumber," said Al Porter.

"Cucumber," corrected Dug Haley.

"I said what I meant!" snapped Porter. "If you wants to correct me on vegetation, you better mean the same thing that I do."

"There's been enough fightin'," observed the sheriff. "Did anybody hear what caused Tex to hit Barnhardt?"

Nobody had. Some one secured a bucket of water, which they sluiced over the helpless Barnhardt. It made a mess of him, but served to jolt him back to consciousness. After a minute or two he was able to stand on his feet, but his jaw did not function properly. Hashknife examined it but found it was not broken.

"Why did he hit yuh, Lee?" asked the sheriff.

"Idnuk," said Lee painfully. Interpreted, this might be construed to mean "I don't know."

And this was all the explanation he was willing to mumble. He went out to his sway-backed horse, and headed for Blue Wells, riding slowly and caressing his jaw.

The sheriff was the last to leave, and he would have stayed longer, except that the four cowboys from the AK ranch rode in. They had heard of the dynamiting, in Blue Wells. The sheriff did not care for their company; so he rode away.

"My ——, that shore is another wreck of the Hesperus, ain't she?" said Eskimo Swensen. "Wham! I'll betcha she made some noise."

"It came near being serious," said Jimmy.

Johnny Grant grinned widely and slapped Jimmy on the back.

"You derned hoodoo! It looks as though this was the third time they'd tried to kill yuh off. I dunno what they'll use next."

"Tie him on a railroad track," suggested Oyster.

Johnny drew Hashknife aside, and they sat down together on a pile of shattered adobe bricks.

"I've been wantin' to talk with you, Hartley," said Johnny seriously. "Yo're workin' on this hold-up case, ain't yuh?"

"Well?" Hashknife admitted nothing.

"I heard yuh was; so I'm goin' to tell yuh what I know about it."

And while the other boys examined the wreckage, Johnny Grant told Hashknife of that night in Blue Wells, when they got drunk and locked the sheriff in his own cell. And of the incident at the train, when they staged an impromptu battle with the engineer and fireman; not knowing what it was all about.

He told Hashknife of the man who came along the track in the dark, went into the express car and got the dog.

"Somebody cut our broncs loose that night," said Johnny. "I understand that the sheriff's horses were also turned loose, and it kinda looks as though it was done to prevent a posse from trailin' 'em. Of course, they wouldn't know that Al Porter was in Encinas, visitin' his girl, and that the sheriff was in jail."

Hashknife grinned widely and thanked Johnny for his information.

"Thasall right," said Johnny. "Yo're sure welcome. Yuh see, we don't care much for the sheriff and his deputy. They said we ought to be run out of the country; so we kept still about what happened to us. But when they jailed the Taylor outfit, I just got to thinkin' that mebbe our evidence might help to land the right ones. I didn't want to give it to Wade, the railroad detective, because he acted so —— smart; but I'm givin' it to you, because you—because I had a talk with Goode, over at the X Bar 6."

"Well, that may not help us all the way out, but it's somethin' to grab on to," smiled Hashknife. "That feller Goode probably lied a lot about us, but he means all right, I guess."

"Well," confessed Johnny gravely, "he sure scared me into tellin' yuh all I knew."

"You look like a feller that scares easy," grinned Hashknife. "I'll betcha all three of you fellers would run from a shadow."

"Well, yuh can't do much damage to a shadow, yuh know. We'd like yuh to know that if yuh need three fellers that are strong in the muscle and weak in the head, yuh might call on us."

"Thanks, Grant. I reckon Nanah and Marion are cookin' dinner, and if I was you, I'd stick around for the meal. Marion wants to thank yuh for offerin' accommodations to us on the round-up."

"George Bonnette done that, Hartley. 'S funny Tex Alden didn't offer to take care of yuh."

"I reckon he's sore about Jimmy bein' here."

"M-m-m-m-m-m. Hartley, no matter what yore personal opinion is of Tex Alden, he's a white man, and a —— of a good cow-hand. Mebbe he's kinda off-color on account of carin' a lot for that girl, but he's a square shooter—all the time."

"Yeah? He ordered Jimmy Legg to get out of the country. That night Jimmy was shot, just after he had left Marion Taylor, at the front of the Blue Wells hotel. A little later on, a shot from the hill out there almost got him again."

"I know that," Johnny shook his head. "If I was goin' off at half-cock, I'd nod toward Tex, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose I would, Grant—but I don't."

"No? Well, that's good. I talked with Tex the other day. He admits that it looks as if he done it."

Marion called to them from the rear door, and they headed for the wash-bench, dropping the subject of Tex Alden.

And while they ate dinner at the Double Bar 8, Lee Barnhardt rode into Blue Wells, stabled his horse and went to see the doctor, who did a little to alleviate the pain in his jaw. Back in his office, he filled his pipe and tried to enjoy a smoke, but flung the pipe aside, because he couldn't keep his mind on tobacco. It was the one time in his life that Lee Barnhardt was thoroughly mad. Just now he hated everybody, and everything—especially Tex Alden.

And while his anger was at fever-heat, Scotty Olson, the sheriff, walked into the office.

"How's yore jaw?" asked the sheriff.

"None of your —— business!"

The exclamation seemed to hurt Lee's jaw, and he clapped a hand to the side of his face, shutting one eye tightly.

"I reckon it's all well," said the sheriff sarcastically. "Tex hit yuh a dinger of a punch, didn't he. I never did see a feller flatten out prettier than you did. My ——, you was jist about as animated as a scarecrow, after yuh pull the braces out of it! I asked Tex a while ago why he hit yuh, and he said for me to ask you."

"And you came to ask me, did you?" Barnhardt was almost crying with anger. "You haven't a brain in your head."

"I thought there was a reason," said the sheriff mildly. "Of course, if he was jist doin' it for fun—"

"Fun, eh?" gritted Barnhardt. "I'll make him think it was fun. He owes the X Bar 6 eight thousand dollars, and he'll pay it, or go to jail for embezzlement. I'll show him! And for your own information, I'll tell you that Tex knew the money for the Santa Rita was coming in on that train."

"How did he know that, Lee?"

"By ——, I told him it was!"

"How did you know?"

"I guessed it."

The sheriff sat down and studied the situation, while the lawyer caressed his sore jaw and wondered if he was showing good judgment in telling all this about Tex.

"And you think Tex held up that train, Lee?"

"I didn't say that, Scotty."

"No, I know yuh didn't; but yuh hinted at it. If Tex hears this, he'll hit yuh with somethin' besides his fist."

"I suppose." Lee looked gloomily at the wall, one eye half shut from the pain in his jaw.

Came the sound of a step at the doorway, and Tex Alden came in. Barnhardt jerked up his head quickly and stared at the man who had knocked him cold.

"Hello, Scotty," said Tex evenly.

He did not speak to Barnhardt, as he came up to the lawyer's desk, drawing a bulky package from his pocket.

"I owe yuh that much, Barnhardt," Tex said coldly. "Mebbe yuh better count it."

Barnhardt swallowed heavily, but made no move to pick up the money. Tex eyed him for a moment, turned and walked out, without saying anything more. Barnhardt shifted uneasily, but finally picked up the package, walked to his small safe, opened it with a key, and put away the package.

He came back and sat down, making no explanation.

"Tex wasn't very cheerful," observed Scotty.

Barnhardt shook his head and sighed deeply.

"I think I'll take a little trip, Scotty; kinda get away until time for that trial. I've been pretty steady on the job for two years, and a little change would do me good."

"A change does anybody good," admitted the sheriff. "I'd like to go with yuh. What'll yuh do, close yore office?"

"I think so. I won't be gone more than a week, but I think, under the circumstances, I should go away until things clear a little."

"I suppose so, Lee."

The sheriff thought it would really be a wise thing for Barnhardt to go away for a while, and he said so to Hashknife that evening, when Hashknife stopped at the office for a few minutes. They were discussing the incident at the Double Bar 8, and Hashknife wondered how Barnhardt's jaw was feeling. The sheriff told of Tex's bringing a package of money to Lee Barnhardt, and he also told Hashknife what Barnhardt had said about Tex knowing about that shipment of money.

"I wouldn't tell that to anybody else," said the sheriff. "But it appears that you're workin' on the case, and yuh ought to know about these things."

"When does Barnhardt intend to leave?" asked Hashknife.

"He didn't say; but I expect he'll leave tomorrow. Between me and you, he's scared of Tex Alden, and he wants to git away for a few days to let Tex cool off. Lee talks too —— much."

"That's a human failin'," smiled Hashknife.

But Lee Barnhardt did not go on any trip. When he got up the following morning he found that some one had opened his safe during the night, and had looted it of everything it contained. The bank did not have a safety vault; so Barnhardt found himself cleaned out, as everything he owned was in his own safe.

He sat down at his desk and stared at the empty valise, which he had brought along and placed beside the safe. His clothes were packed in a larger valise. He seemed stunned, his vacant gaze fixed upon the half-open door of the safe.

The fruits of two years' work had been in that safe, when he locked the office the night before. He had never feared a robbery, because a lawyer's safe usually only held papers, of no value to any one, except to the lawyer.

His dazed condition passed, leaving him in a state of perspiration. He got to his feet and staggered over to the safe, peering within, trying to convince himself that it was only a dream. He went to the front door and gazed out at the street. It was fairly early in the morning, and there were few people in evidence. He heard the train leave the station; the train he had intended leaving on, and he turned away, choking a curse.

He went to his desk, and with shaking fingers he opened a drawer and took out a revolver, which he put in his pocket. He unbuttoned his vest, disclosing a narrow strap across his bosom, attesting to the fact that he was wearing a shoulder-holster. Then he sat down, trying to think just what to do.

"I've got to find Tex Alden," he told himself. "Tex saw me put that money in my safe. —— him, he paid his debt before a witness, and then took it back—took everything in the safe. If he don't give it back to me, I'll kill him."

He flung the two valises behind his desk and walked to the door. Al Porter was coming toward the office. Barnhardt tried to appear indifferent, although he knew

Porter would question him. As Porter neared the office, Marion Taylor, Jimmy Legg and Sleepy came riding down the street. Porter came up to Barnhardt, but did not speak, and they watched the riders draw up in front of them.

"Good morning, Mr. Barnhardt," said Marion. "We looked for you at the depot a while ago. Did you decide to not go away?"

Barnhardt nodded dumbly, because he dared not speak.

"Where's the tall feller?" asked Porter.

"He went away on the train," said Sleepy, beginning the manufacture of a cigaret.

"Went away, eh? Gone to stay?"

"No-o-o; just to Encinas."

Barnhardt swallowed heavily and tried to smile.

"That's where Al's girl lives," he offered.

"He may see her," replied Sleepy seriously.

Porter stared at Sleepy, wondering if this innocent-eyed cowboy meant anything by that remark.

"We came in pretty early," said Marion, "and I wonder if the sheriff will let me in the jail."

"He's in the office," growled Porter. "I reckon he will."

They moved on toward the jail, and Porter turned angrily to Barnhardt.

"That was a —— of a remark to make! You ain't got no interest in my girl, have yuh?"

"Not a particle."

"Then never mind about her; *sabe?* You monkey with my business and you'll get worse than Tex Alden gave yuh."

"Did you come up here to pick a fight?" queried Barnhardt.

"Any old time I look for trouble, I won't pick out a —— wide-mouthed lawyer, that's a cinch."

Porter turned on his heel and went to the stable, where he saddled his horse and rode out of town.

Barnhardt waited until the three riders had left the sheriff's office, and then went down there. The sheriff looked quizzically at him.

"I thought you was goin' away this mornin', Lee."

"Changed my mind," said Barnhardt. "May go tomorrow."

The sheriff nodded and looked at some papers on his desk.

"Hartley went away this mornin'," offered Barnhardt.

The sheriff looked up.

"Yeah, they said he did; went to Encinas."

"Yes. I guess he expected me to go on the same train."

"Prob'ly did. I told him yuh was goin' away this mornin'."

Barnhardt went back to his office, his mind still traveling in circles. He knew what would happen if he accused Tex Alden of opening the safe. Tex was hot-headed, and Barnhardt knew he could never best Tex in any kind of a fair fight. If he accused Tex of theft, he'd never get his money and papers back.

So Barnhardt decided to wait and see, even if the waiting did gall his soul. No one, except himself and the man who opened the safe, knew that such a thing had been done. He had thought of having Tex arrested, but decided that his evidence against Tex only consisted of Tex's knowing that the eight thousand was in the safe. Barnhardt had counted the package of money, when he was alone, and it contained that amount of currency.

Sleepy, Jimmy and Marion did not ride back to the ranch on the road, but circled through the hills. It was early morning, and they were in no hurry to return. A coyote invited them to a race, and they gave him what he was looking for. Only a barrier of mesquite, into which he sped like a gray shadow, saved him from Sleepy's loop.

Flocks of white-wing doves hurtled past them, heading for the water-holes; quail called from the slopes; a deer broke from a thicket, and after a few short, stiff-legged jumps, headed up a slope, head cocked back, walking jerkily.

They were nearing the ranch when they described a flock of buzzards, circling low over a little ravine, like scraps of black paper, caught in the grip of a whirlwind.

"Somebody lost a cow," said Sleepy, "and it's eatin' time for Mr. Buzzard."

"I hope it isn't any of our stock," said Marion. "We can't afford to feed any buzzards this year."

Jimmy evinced a desire to investigate; so he and Sleepy rode down to the ravine, while Marion circled higher on the hill. The air suddenly filled with flapping buzzards, croaking hoarsely; possibly swearing in their own language on being interrupted at their morning meal.

It was not a cow, but a horse, which lay at the bottom of the ravine; a gray horse, partly eaten by buzzards, but with the brand still showing. Sleepy quickly noticed that its right fore leg was broken about half-way between knee and hock. Further investigation showed that the animal had been shot through the head, and that the shooter had held his gun so close that the powder had scorched the hair.

"Broke a leg and had to be shot," said Sleepy. "Not so very long ago."

They mounted and rode back to Marion, who had waited for them. Sleepy explained what caused the buzzards to congregate.

"What brand was on the animal?" she asked. Sleepy rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "Well, it happens to be a Double Bar 8."

"One of our horses?"

"Yeah—a gray. Weigh about a thousand. Got some dark spots on the rump, and its fetlocks are almost black."

"Why, that horse belonged to Buck! He didn't ride it often. But I never heard Buck say anything about shooting it."

"And pretty close to home, too," observed Jimmy.

The little ravine where the horse lay was not over an eighth of a mile from the Double Bar 8 stable.

"If the wind had blown down from that direction, we'd 'a' knowed it before this," grinned Sleepy.

The discovery of this horse interested Sleepy. He felt sure that Buck would have mentioned it at the ranch. The horse had either fallen into the ravine and broke a leg or stepped into a hole. It was also very evident that the rider had mercifully put the animal out of its misery. And Sleepy wondered who, except some of the Taylor outfit, would be riding a Double Bar 8 horse so near the ranch.

He rode to Blue Wells that evening and met Hashknife, whom he told about the dead horse. They found the sheriff at his office, and he let them in to see Buck Taylor. Buck was glad to see them, but denied knowing anything about the horse being dead.

"I ain't seen that horse for quite a while," he said. "He wasn't exactly a good cow-horse; so I let him drift. Plenty of speed, but he never seemed to *sabe* what it was all about. Who do yuh reckon killed him?"

"Somebody must 'a' borrowed him, I s'pose," said Hashknife.

"Well, I wish we was out of here," sighed Buck. "With all this shootin' and dynamitin', I sure hate to stay here. I'd like to find the dirty snake that's doin' it all."

Hashknife and Sleepy left the jail and went to the livery-stable, where they had left Hashknife's horse that morning. Hashknife had nothing to say about his trip to Encinas, and Sleepy knew that questions were useless. Hashknife always worked on the theory that a secret is safe only with one person.

It was about ten o'clock when they approached the Double Bar 8, riding silently. There was a light in the ranch-house window, and as they drew closer they heard Jimmy's and Marion's voices blended in "After the Ball," accompanied by the old upright organ. The two cowboys drew rein and listened. Off to the left of them a horse nickered softly. They peered in that direction, thinking it was a loose horse.

Then they went on, their horses making little noise in the sandy road, and drew up just outside the patio entrance. They could hear Marion and Jimmy laughing, as Marion tried to strike the right chord on the old organ.

Something prompted Hashknife to walk from his horse to the patio entrance, where he stopped quickly. A man's voice snapped a warning, a streak of flame flashed toward him, and a bullet crashed into the corner of the entrance.

Two men were running toward the broken place in the wall, stumbling over the débris. Hashknife drew his six-shooter and fired twice, yelling at Sleepy to circle the wall. Another bullet whined off the adobe wall near him, as he started across the patio, heading for where the men had gone out.

Sleepy had dismounted, and he did not think to mount and ride. In fact, he hardly knew what it was all about. He ran around the wall and almost collided with Hashknife, who sprang out through where the dynamite had wrecked the wall.

"What the —— was it?" panted Sleepy.

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" whispered Hashknife. "Listen."

They stood against the ruined wall, straining their ears for the slightest sound.

Then they heard the distant thud of running horses, growing fainter and fainter, as the riders faded away in the hills.

Hashknife swore softly, as he told Sleepy of the two men. Some one had extinguished the lamp in the ranch-house, and Sleepy called, telling them that everything was all right.

They found Marion and Jimmy on the back porch, and told them about the two men who had shot at Hashknife.

"Oh, I'm a fine guard!" said Jimmy bitterly. "Sleepy told me to keep an eye open. But we started singing, and—"

"Oh, it's all right," laughed Hashknife. "Nobody hurt. If we'd only gone over and investigated, when that horse nickered, Sleepy, we'd 'a' had 'em cinched. But I didn't look for 'em to come back so soon. That's sure a puzzle. The further I go into this thing, the worse the fog gets.

"They wasn't over here by the house. They could 'a' looked in the window and seen who was in there. They might 'a' been waitin' for us to come back, but if they were, why did they let us walk in on 'em? I heard one of 'em snap a warnin'; so it kinda looks as though they didn't expect us just then."

"Do you think you hit either one of them?" asked Jimmy nervously.

Hashknife laughed.

"I was shootin' for general results. A man runnin' in the dark, jumpin' through a broken wall, is a hard target. And when yuh hit a man with a .45 in any spot, except his hands, arms, or the end of his nose, he won't go far; so I'll admit that I missed 'em."

For the next two nights Hashknife and Sleepy guarded the place, but no one came. The sheriff visited them, but they did not mention anything about the latest development. Hashknife was very thoughtful all the while, but admitted that he was getting nowhere in his deductions. He talked with Marion about Tex Alden and Le Moyne, and she seemed surprized when he told her that it was the general opinion that there was a rivalry over her between Tex and Le Moyne.

"Why, that is ridiculous," she told Hashknife. "Mr. Le Moyne used to drop in here once in a while, but he hasn't been here for over a month, except when they all came out to see the ruins of our bunkhouse."

"As far as Tex is concerned, the opinion ain't far off, is it?"

Marion flushed.

"I liked Tex all right," she admitted. "He is nice, as long as his temper doesn't run away with him. Tex has a bad temper, you know."

"And he hates Jimmy Legg, because Jimmy Legg happens to be here," observed Hashknife.

Marion looked at Hashknife, her eyes puzzled. Then—

"You don't think Tex was the one—" she hesitated.

"That tried to kill Jimmy?" Hashknife finished for her.

"Oh, Tex couldn't do a thing like that, Hashknife!"

"No?" Hashknife smiled slowly. "Yuh don't think so?"

Marion shook her head quickly.

"Not even if he was mad. He might be mad enough for a moment to kill some one, but not to shoot from ambush."

"Well," grinned Hashknife, "I'll have to mark Tex Alden off my list of customers. It seems that Tex lost eight thousand dollars to Antelope Neal, in a poker game. This was before we came here. Now I've been wonderin' how Tex could afford it."

"Yes, I heard about it, Hashknife. Tex works on a salary—the salary of a foreman—and he surely couldn't afford to lose that amount of money. In fact, I don't see where he got it."

"I know where he got it," smiled Hashknife. "But I don't see where he'll ever be able to pay it back."

Further than that Hashknife would not say, although Marion was curious to hear more about Tex Alden.

That evening Hashknife and Sleepy decided to visit Blue Wells, and talked things over with Jimmy.

"We may be back late," explained Hashknife. "There's a two-barreled shotgun in the house, and I saw some shells on a shelf in the kitchen. You load that gun, Jimmy, and keep it handy. Lock all the doors, and be sure that every curtain is down. I don't look for any trouble, but yuh never can tell."

"I'll take care of everything," declared Jimmy. "And I'm not afraid. If anybody comes fooling around here tonight, I'll give them a surprize. I'll make it a point to keep awake."

They rode to Blue Wells after dark that night, and found the three boys from the AK at the Oasis. Being Saturday night, there was quite a crowd in town, and the games were flourishing. Johnny Grant, Oyster Shell and Eskimo Swensen welcomed Hashknife and Sleepy with open arms.

Tex Alden, Plenty Goode and Ed Gast were in from the X Bar 6. Tex was cordial, and talked with Hashknife about the dynamiting. Hashknife knew that Tex was wondering where Jimmy Legg was, and finally Tex asked him if Marion wasn't afraid to stay at the ranch with only the Indian woman.

"Jimmy's out there," said Hashknife.

"Do yuh call that protection, Hartley?"

Hashknife smiled, but said nothing. He was thinking of Jimmy and the short, ten-gauge Parker. Le Moyne and several of the men from the Santa Rita mine were in town. In the course of the evening Hashknife sat in on a poker game, in which Tex Alden, Plenty Goode, Johnny Grant, Scotty Olson and Antelope Neal tried to outguess each other in the pastime. Sleepy and Oyster Shell quarreled for hours over a bottle-pool game, which was being refereed by Eskimo Swensen, who had an injured hand, and was unable to play.

It was within an hour of daylight when Hashknife drew out of the poker game. He had won enough to make it worth his while, and Antelope Neal said he had never been more willing to cash in any man's chips and have his luck out of the game.

Sleepy was glad to go home.

"I've walked a hundred miles around that darned pool table," he declared, as they left the Oasis. "A pile of blankets will look like a bank-roll to me."

There was a cold breeze blowing as they rode back to the Double Bar 8, and the crimson glow of the rising sun painted the crests of the eastern hills, as they rode in at the stable and put up their horses.

"Well, it don't look like any more dynamitin' had been done since we left," observed Sleepy, as they walked across the patio toward the rear door of the ranch-house.

"All is serene," said Hashknife, and as he spoke Nanah came to the doorway.

The Indian woman was a pitiful sight. Her face was streaked with blood, her dress torn, and she staggered wearily.

"For —— sake!" gasped Hashknife. He took her by the shoulders. "What's wrong, Nanah? What happened to you? Where's Marion and Jimmy?"

There was blood on her hair, and Hashknife could see that a livid welt ran from her right temple and disappeared in her mop of disheveled black hair.

"I do' know," she choked. "Men come," she brushed her hand across her eyes, as though to clear her vision. "Have rag on faces. Knock Jimmy down. Take Marion, go that way." She leaned one shoulder heavily on Hashknife and pointed east.

"Yuh mean that masked men came and took Marion?"

She nodded dumbly. Hashknife led her to a chair and made her sit down. The room showed signs of a struggle, and there were a number of blood stains on the floor and walls.

"What does it mean, Hashknife?" queried Sleepy anxiously.

"Where's Jimmy?" asked Hashknife.

Nanah shook her head. She didn't know where he was.

"I hear much noise," she said dumbly. "I come. Jimmy on floor. I run to door. Man hit me." Her hand went to her head. "I fall on floor. I do' know. I look from window, I see."

"You saw 'em goin' that way?"

"Yes."

"How many men, Nanah?"

"I do' know. I can't see very good. Too much blood."

"How long ago, Nanah?"

"I do' know. Pretty sick in head."

"She got an awful wallop," said Sleepy. "Prob'ly got to the window, saw 'em pullin' out, and collapsed. What's the program?"

Hashknife ran through the house and came back.

"The shotgun is gone," he said. "They've taken Marion toward Broken Cañon, but the devil only knows just where. Nanah, are you all right? We've got to get help. You stay here."

"Pretty good," she said. "You go quick."

They ran back to the stable and saddled their horses. The horses seemed to sense the need of speed, and the two boys mounted on the run. Sleepy stood in his stirrups, his lips opened in a soundless yell. This was action. They swung around the point of a hill, heading up through a swale, a mile or more from the ranch-house. Hashknife spurred in close to Sleepy.

"Get the sheriff and all the boys yuh can get together, and head for Broken Cañon, Sleepy. I'm goin' back."

Sleepy did not question him. He had spent too many years with Hashknife to question any action of the tall cowboy. He merely nodded, drew his hat down over his brow and headed for Blue Wells to gather a posse, while Hashknife drew rein, turned around and went back.

The poker game had just broken up, when Sleepy dropped off his horse at the door of the Oasis, and panted out his story.

"Good ——!" exclaimed Tex Alden. "There's more than one hole-in-the-ground in Broken Cañon! Let's go!"

Scotty Olson, the sheriff, got his horse, and they rode out of Blue Wells, nine strong; Olson, Sleepy, Tex, Gast, Goode, Johnny Grant, Eskimo and Oyster Shell. There was nothing for them to work on, except that Nanah had said that the men had gone toward Broken Cañon.

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTURED

IT WOULD have been difficult for any of Jimmy's friends to have recognized him, unless they examined him closely. His face was plastered with gore, one eye swelled shut and his lip cut. He had no hat, one sleeve of his shirt flapped behind him, like a streamer tied to his shoulder. He had no saddle. In the crook of one elbow he carried the heavy, double-barrel shotgun. That was the extent of his armament. It was the first time he had ever ridden a bareback horse, and he was having plenty of difficulty in staying on the animal's back.

Jimmy was still in a daze—but a very determined sort of a daze. All night long he had stayed awake, guarding the ranch-house. Dawn was in sight when he dozed, only to be awakened by a knock on the back door.

"Is that you, Hashknife?" he had asked, and it seemed to him that an affirmative reply had been given. At any rate he had opened the door, only to find himself confronted by three masked men. And before he had time to move, one of the men struck him across the head with a gun barrel, knocking him down. But the blow was a glancing one, and did not knock him out.

Badly dazed he got to his feet, trying to fight, and one of the men drove several smashing blows to his head and face, knocking him out. He had little idea of what happened after that, until returning consciousness gave him a blurred vision of these men taking Marion out of the house. He had tried to get up, but his limbs refused to function.

He saw Nanah crawl to a window, where she managed to look out, before she crumpled to the floor. It seemed years to him before he could get to the window, but his vision had cleared sufficiently to enable him to see the riders going away.

Summoning up every bit of his courage, he secured the shotgun, and managed to stagger to the stable, where he bridled a horse, crawled on its back, and followed them. He was like a man riding through a fog. He had no idea of direction. With his right hand he tried to wipe the blood out of his eyes, but gave it up.

He remembered that there were three men. But that did not matter. He had two cartridges in that shotgun, and he could use the gun as a club, after those shots were gone, he decided. He was no longer the smiling James Eaton Legg, but Jimmy Legg—cowboy. The bookkeeper was gone entirely, and in his place was a bloody-faced young man, who wanted to kill somebody with a shotgun.

Jimmy did not know how long he had ridden. The sun was shining, and his head ached badly. He wanted to stop and lie down, but he kept on going, laughing grimly to himself. The horse stopped, and Jimmy realized that it was standing on the edge of a cañon. He did not know that this was Broken Cañon. Names meant nothing to him. The horse turned to the right and followed the cañon rim. At times they swung far to the right, passing around the head of tributary cañons, but always coming back to the main cañon rim.

Jimmy's reason was coming back to him now, but it only made the incidents more vivid in his mind. He realized that he had left his six-shooter at the ranch, and that the two cartridges in his gun were all he had.

The horse picked its way among a piled-up mass of big rocks and tangled brush, and came out on sort of mesa. The cañon widened here, its depths purple and gold in the rising sun. On the far side of the cañon were sandstone minarets, gleaming gold-like at the top, banded with red, fading into a deep purple below the sun-line.

But Jimmy had no eyes for the beauties of the sunrise. He could see several people near the cañon rim, a quarter of a mile away, their horses etched in relief against the gray of a huge upthrust slap of gray stone. Then he saw two of the riders turn and ride directly away from the cañon, going at a swift gallop.

He saw the others ride out of sight, as if going down into the cañon. Jimmy felt sure that the first two were men, and if Marion was one of the party, she must have been one of those to go into the cañon. He spurred his horse down through the tangle of brush, heading for that huge gray slab, regardless of mesquite, cactus and other thorny things that tore at his legs.

He reached the spot, and found that a trail led down into the cañon, partly masked by the granite cliff. He could see where it disappeared around a sharp corner, and he wondered how any one could ride down there without being scraped off. But he knew there was only one thing to do—and that was to head down the trail. Clutching the mane of the horse in one hand, and holding his precious shotgun close to his body, he spurred the horse down the narrow trail, leaning away from the cañon depth, but letting the horse take its own gait.

Jimmy had little time to do any observation work. In fact, he had almost forgotten that he was following any one, as his mind was wholly taken up in fear of this rough trail. Suddenly he realized that he was almost at the bottom. He could see the piled-up boulders in the bottom, the glint of a small stream.

His horse slipped, and its pawing hoofs sent a shower of stones off the trail, crashing down through the dry foliage, rattling off the rocks at the bottom. Jimmy had slipped to its rump, but managed to claw his way back. He had dropped his reins, but was not making any effort to recover them for fear of frightening the horse.

Suddenly he felt a tug at his leg, and the horse seemed to fairly fall from under him, while the crash of a shot echoed back and forth from the sides of the cañon. Jimmy sprawled above the horse, falling across his shotgun. For several moments he did not move. Then he drew up his left leg. The bullet had scored him slightly just above the knee-cap, doing little damage.

He tried to crawl away, but the bank was too steep. He turned over on his back, twisting sideways, trying to see below him, but could see nobody. Ignorantly inviting another shot, he crawled to his feet and stepped down past the horse, which was so badly hurt that it scarcely moved. Another shot crashed out, the bullet passing so close to Jimmy that he wasn't sure it did not hit him. Instinctively jerking aside, his feet flew from under him, and he cascaded down to the bottom of the cañon, taking a conglomeration of brush and rocks with him, which slowed up his progress enough to enable him to reach the bottom, uninjured, except for numerous cuts and bruises and the sacrifice of a goodly portion of his raiment.

But he clung to his shotgun. Nothing short of general cataclysm would make Jimmy Legg let loose of that gun. It was his one hope. He landed in a clump of huge boulders, while over him poured more gravel and rubbish, which had followed in his wake.

In fact, he was so covered with débris that the masked man, holding a ready rifle, who came looking for a dead man, did not see him for a few moments. This man stepped cautiously up on a ledge of rock, about a hundred feet from the sand and brush that covered Jimmy, who lifted the shotgun, pointed it in his general direction and pulled the trigger.

The big shotgun roared like a cannon, kicked Jimmy so hard that it fairly dusted him off. He got to his feet, panting the breath back into his tortured lungs, as he surged forward, looking for concealment. The man dropped off the rock, with a yelp of amazement, possibly tinged with injury. A dozen buckshot are not to be faced lightly.

Jimmy landed behind a boulder, rubbed his shoulder, which was numb from the recoil of the shotgun, and began crawling ahead. He peered over a boulder, and a bullet filled his eyes with rock-dust.

"I guess I didn't kill him," observed Jimmy, and angled his way to another boulder. He had only one shot left now. Another boulder seemed to beckon him, and a bullet struck just short of him, cutting his right cheek with flying gravel. Jimmy curled up behind the boulder and took stock of himself.

"This won't do," he decided. "I'm doing all the moving. If I could only get to that boulder, I could crawl up the other side and be on a level with him."

It was a long chance, but Jimmy took it, and he sprawled in behind the cover of brush and rocks, while a ricocheting bullet hummed away up the cañon, like an angry bee. The heavy screen of brush enabled him to crawl up out of the watercourse, and it seemed that this was just what the other man did not want, because he sent bullet after bullet through the brush, picking spots at intervals of a few feet.

But in spite of his bombardment, Jimmy reached the top of the washout, where he sprawled on his face, panting heavily. The man put a few more bullets through the brush, which proved to Jimmy that the shooter did not know that he had reached the top.

Jimmy's face was bleeding badly, and his mouth was salty from sweat and gore. He found that his leg wound was also bleeding considerably, but gave him little pain. He took time to wrap his handkerchief around it to keep out the dirt.

Then he began crawling again, snaking his way through the brush, trying to see the man who wanted to kill him. He came to the fringe of the brush, and peered out. He could see the man now; that is, he could see his head and shoulders and rifle. He was still watching the place where Jimmy had dropped behind the boulder, before climbing out of the washout.

Farther down the cañon he could see the two horses, and on one was the figure of a girl, evidently roped tightly, because she was having difficulty in looking back toward the scene of conflict.

Jimmy studied the man, and tried to map out a plan of attack. He was about a hundred feet away, but Jimmy thought the target too small to take a chance on his remaining shot. He saw the man look back toward the horses. He was evidently getting impatient. Brush grew fairly heavy along the slope, and Jimmy pondered the chances he might have to work his way to the horses without being seen. It would be a dangerous move, he decided. Anyway, he liked the cover of the boulder-strewn brush, and as long as the man was willing to wait, he would, too.

He saw the man take off his hat and lift it above the top of the rock. It rather puzzled Jimmy. He jerked it down quickly. Then he exposed it in another place. It suddenly struck Jimmy that this man was trying to draw his fire, and his blood-caked features cracked into a grin.

An insane desire to yell at this man gripped at him. He wanted to laugh, to joke this man. But his better judgment bade him be still. He saw the man move forward to another boulder, where he repeated the cap-lifting. Jimmy realized that this man was getting impatient to have the fight finished.

The man kept moving ahead, until he was masked from Jimmy, who crawled out of the brush and headed for the rim of the washout again, trading sides with the other man. For about thirty feet Jimmy crawled swiftly, dropped behind some cover and waited.

It was about five minutes later that he saw the man again. He had moved farther up the cañon, possibly thinking that Jimmy had made his escape. By standing up, Jimmy could get a good look at this man, who was too far away for Jimmy to take a chance with the shotgun; so Jimmy dropped back into the washout, bent down low and headed in the general direction of the horses.

But he had not escaped detection. A bullet sang past his ear, and he stumbled over a boulder, falling sidewise into a cut on the left-hand side of the washout. To the shooter, it possibly appeared as if he had been struck. Jimmy was half-standing, half-lying in the cut, when he heard the drumming of footsteps, as the man hurried forward. There was no chance of concealment there.

It seemed as if the man were almost over him, when he raised up, shoving the shotgun barrel over the rim of the washout. The man jerked to a stop, only fifty feet away, firing his rifle from his hip, just as Jimmy pressed the trigger. The bullet struck just in front of Jimmy's face, filling his nose, eyes and mouth with dirt, and the kick of the shotgun sent him running backward down the short slope, where he hooked his heel on a rock, and sprawled on his back.

It was several moments before he could get up. He felt weak, nauseated, as he spat out the dirt, blinked tearfully and climbed to the top of the washout. Out there on the flat ground was the man, sprawling on his face, his rifle flung aside.

Jimmy did not go near him. He sighed heavily and headed for the horses, where Marion's white face and astonished eyes drove every other thought from his mind. Neither of them spoke as he cut the ropes which bound her, and she got stiffly from the saddle, clinging to him.

"You—you came, didn't you, Jimmy?" she whispered hoarsely.

"Yea-a-ah, I sure did." Jimmy grinned on one side of his face, because the other was glued tightly with gore. "It was quite a trip. This has been a tough season, Marion."

It was rather inane conversation, but under the circumstances it was excusable.

The man was trying to sit up, and Marion pointed to him breathlessly. Jimmy went staggering out to him, a loose-jointed young man, who had been hurt so many times that he was numb all over. He picked up the rifle and stepped back, tottering on his feet.

"You better stay where you are," he told the masked man. "You ain't so awful tough."

Jimmy had heard Johnny Grant use that expression, and it seemed to fit the occasion. He turned his head and called to Marion.

"Can you lead the horses up here, Marion? We've got to pack this lead-filled person to a doctor, or he won't live to be hung."

CHAPTER XIV

WHO GOT THE PAY-ROLL?

WHEN Hashknife turned back to the Double Bar 8 it was because of a single theory. He was fairly positive that Marion had not been kidnaped by those men because they wanted her; but that they had had reasons of more importance to them than the mere capture of a young lady. Hashknife wasn't sure just what this was, but he had a suspicion—at least, enough suspicion to send him back to the ranch, instead of heading a posse over to the breaks of Broken Cañon.

He rode his horse into the stable, unsaddled quickly, turned it into the corral, and ran to the house, where he found Nanah, bathing her head in a basin of water. He explained to her the necessity of locking the house, covering the windows, and of keeping out of sight.

Without question she obeyed him, and he went back to the stable, climbed to the little loft and sprawled near the window, concealed by a screen of hay. He could not see over the ranch-house, except at a distance, but his little window gave him a fairly good view of the country toward Broken Cañon.

Apollo wandered about the patio, possibly wondering why no one was about. Mocking-birds sang from the twisted vines along the walls, and little lizards scuttled here and there over the débris of the former bunk-house. Hashknife yawned and waited, wondering what success Sleepy had had in gathering a posse.

He had been there over an hour, when his keen eyes detected two riders, who seemed to be coming swiftly toward the ranch from the northeast. Blue Wells was almost directly north. He wondered if some of the posse had turned back from going to Broken Cañon and were coming to the ranch.

When about a mile from the ranch they swung due west, passing from Hashknife's vision. He went to the rear of the loft, and peered from a crack. The riders came into sight, swinging in toward the ranch again, but disappeared into the cañon where Hashknife had captured Plenty Goode, following the mysterious shot from the hill.

It took them several minutes to cross the cañon, and he saw them draw rein in the heavy cover, where they stayed for about five minutes, evidently studying the ranch buildings. Their elevation gave them a good view of the whole country.

Finally they rode down toward the stable. Hashknife was unable to recognize them, nor did he recognize their horses—a roan and a gray. Softly Hashknife went back to his former position at the window. He heard the riders come in behind the stable, where they stopped. After a few moments he heard them in the stable, talking softly. One of them laughed, but their conversation was too indistinct for Hashknife to hear what was said.

He was so intent on listening that he was not aware they were out of the stable, until he turned his head and saw them going into the patio.

It rather amused Hashknife to see that these men were both masked. One of them went to the ranch-house door, finding it locked. It was evident to Hashknife that these men were sure that every one had left the ranch. They conferred together for a moment, and one of them came toward Hashknife, stopping on the ruins of the bunk-house, while the other man swung up on the wall near the corner of the ranch-house and scanned the country.

Slowly Hashknife slid back across the floor, until he reached the ladder, which led down from the loft. He went down the ladder and walked softly to the door, where he peered around the edge. He could hear the sound of some one digging; the dull thud of adobe bricks being thrown aside, but he could not see either of the men now.

Drawing his six-shooter Hashknife went slowly and carefully across the space between the stable door and the patio wall. He could hear the digging plainly now. Then he heard one of the men snap out a curse. It was evidently the man on the wall, because the answering voice was just beyond—

"What's the matter?"

"That —— posse must 'a' seen us! They're comin'!"

The two men were running now, and Hashknife expected them to come through the broken wall past him, but instead they went out the south entrance of the patio, possibly with the intention of keeping the ranch buildings between them and the approaching posse, and circling back to their horses.

Disregarding the fact that the odds were two to one, Hashknife ran swiftly along the wall, coming out within fifty feet of the two men, who were humped over, running as low as possible. There was no time for them to turn; nothing to do but fight or surrender. It was still a hundred feet to the cover of the brush, and Hashknife was between them and the stable. But neither of them thought of surrender. Hashknife fired, as the two men whirled to a stop and drew their guns. One of them went to his knees, and his bullet tore up a spurt of dust half-way between him and Hashknife, and the other man's bullet sang wide of its target. He fired again, but his bullet went skyward, because the shock of Hashknife's next bullet threw him backward. The man who was on his knees fired again, but so wildly that Hashknife did not even hear the bullet.

Then he tried to get to his feet, pitched forward on his face and lay still. The other man did not move, except that he half turned over. Hashknife went slowly up to them, his jaw shut grimly. He had shot deliberately, slowly—only twice. Even with the two-to-one odds, the advantage had been with him, because he had been ready for the battle.

Hashknife did not make any examination of the men. He heard the drumming of hoofs, as the posse rode up, and in a few moments they were surrounded by excited men—the nine men who had ridden out of Blue Wells with Sleepy.

"My ——, it's Al Porter and Chet Le Moyne!" exclaimed the sheriff, tearing the masks off the two men. "Hartley, what does this mean?"

He came to Hashknife, gripping his arm.

"It means that an officer of the law went wrong," said Hashknife coldly.

"But how?" demanded the excited sheriff. "My ——, this needs more explanation than that, Hartley."

"Go easy," advised Sleepy, who turned to Hashknife. "We wasn't quite to the Broken Cañon, when we spotted these two riders. They were headin' this way, foggin' to beat ——; so we follered."

"Good thing yuh did, Sleepy."

Questions volleyed at Hashknife, while others examined Le Moyne and Porter, but Hashknife brushed them all aside.

"They're both as dead as herrin'," said Johnny Grant.

Two more riders came—Antelope Neal and Lee Barnhardt.

"We missed the posse; so came here to see what we could do to help," said Neal.

Barnhardt squinted at the dead men, but said nothing.

"Will yuh please tell us what it means?" asked the sheriff. "You ain't told anythin' yet, yuh know, Hartley."

Hashknife smiled grimly.

"There ain't much to tell, Scotty. These men came here, wearin' masks. They tried to get away when they saw yuh comin', but I blocked 'em, and we shot it out."

"Oh, I can see that! But—"

"Good ——! Here comes some more!" Johnny Grant's yell turned all interest away from Hashknife.

It was Marion and Jimmy on one horse, leading another horse, on which was roped a swaying figure of a man, his body slouched forward until his face was almost buried in his chest. Jimmy was riding behind Marion, clinging to her, while he swayed weakly, a silly smile on his dirty face.

Men ran to them, while others unroped the sagging figure on the other horse. It was Dug Haley, of the Santa Rita mine. He was conscious, but unable to stand. Willing hands lifted Jimmy off the horse, but his left leg was too sore for him to stand on it for several moments.

"I—I got him," Jimmy told Hashknife hoarsely. "Filled him full of shot. We had a regular battle down in the cañon."

The sheriff was goggling from one to another, trying to get things straightened out to his own mind. Hashknife went to Marion.

"Tell us what you know about it, Marion," he said.

"Oh, I don't know very much, Hashknife. Three masked men came, and they—I heard the noise, when they fought with Jimmy, and came out to see what it was about. They had knocked him down, and I thought he was dead.

"They told me to not be afraid, and that everything would be all right. It seems that I wasn't to be hurt. They put me on a horse, and we went to Broken Cañon, where two of the men turned back. They were masked all the time; so I wasn't just sure who they were, because they changed their voices.

"One man took me down into the cañon, and I think he heard Jimmy coming. Anyway, he tied the horses and went back toward the bottom of the trail. I heard a lot of shooting, and I was sure somebody was trying to help me, but I never thought it was Jimmy, until he shot Dug Haley.

"We had a hard time getting him on a horse, because Jimmy was so weak he couldn't help much. But we made it. We've got to get Jimmy to a doctor, because he's all cut to pieces."

Haley was sitting on the ground, goggling at every one. He had lost a lot of blood, but his mind was clear. Hashknife saw him eying the bodies of Le Moyne and Porter; so he stepped over to him.

"Haley," he said kindly, "the game is up. You better come clean, because yo're the last of the three men who stole that pay-roll. Al Porter did not go to Encinas the night of the robbery, and more than that, he and that girl of his busted up two months ago. Which one of yuh rode Buck Taylor's gray horse that night, and had to kill it up there in that little cañon?"

"That was me." Haley spoke hoarsely. "Oh, ——, I might as well admit it. Le Moyne schemed it, and we helped him. But our luck broke bad. Le Moyne had to be at the depot when the train came in, and Porter had to be on the other side of Broken Cañon to pick up a freight early in the mornin'—or when one come along; so it was up to me to take the money to Santa Rita, where we was goin' to hide it.

"I kinda got off in my bearin's, in the dark, and found myself too far south. Then that —— gray horse fell and busted a leg. I had to kill it, yuh see. Then I had all that —— gold to carry. It wasn't safe to cache it in the hills, because I didn't know the country well enough."

Haley smiled grimly.

"I seen the light from the ranch-house, and I was sure it was the Double Bar 8; so I packed the gold down here, lookin' for a place to hide it. Back of the bunk-house I found a hole under the foundation. I scratched a match and looked it over. It wasn't big enough for anythin' but a small dog to get through; so I shoved that money under the bunk-house, and went back to the mine."

"And then dynamited the bunk-house, eh?" queried the sheriff.

"Like ——, we did! That's why we kidnaped the girl. We wanted to draw everybody away; so we could dig the —— money out of the ruins. But we wasn't goin' to hurt her. I was to keep her in the cañon until about noon, and then let her come home. Our idea was to get Hartley and Stevens away from here long enough to let us get the money."

"And it's still under all that adobe, eh?" smiled Hashknife.

"If Le Moyne and Porter didn't get it out. I wish you'd get me to a doctor. I'm full of buckshot. That —— tenderfoot! We didn't count him in a-tall."

"I didn't need to be counted," croaked Jimmy. "But what I want to know is, who shot me, and who blew up the bunk-house?"

Hashknife stepped over and put a hand on Barnhardt's shoulder. The Blue Wells attorney's lips went white and he tried to draw away.

"You tell 'em about it," advised Hashknife. "Just be a man and speak yore little piece, Barnhardt."

"Me?" whispered Barnhardt. "Why—why—I don't know—"

"Do yuh want me to tell it?"

Barnhardt's legs jiggled nervously and he wet his lips with his tongue, while his Adam's apple jiggled convulsively.

"There's nun-nothing to—to—"

"Then I'll tell it," said Hashknife. "And if Mr. Barnhardt don't stand still, keep his hands where they are and not try to scratch his ribs around the spot where his gun hangs in a shoulder-holster, I'll betcha somebody will add him to the list of casualties.

"Mr. Barnhardt is a cousin of Mrs. Martha Eaton, of Chicago, who owns this ranch. For several years Mr. Barnhardt has handled all the affairs of the X Bar 6. In fact, he grew rich, handling her stock interests. But she was a simple old lady, with quite extensive holdings, and she had faith in Mr. Barnhardt.

"Now, if I make any mistakes, I hope Mr. Barnhardt won't interrupt, until I'm finished. A short time ago Mrs. Eaton became an invalid, and was unable to handle her own business. I reckon the doctors have told her that she won't live more than one year more.

"Still bein' of sound mind, she decided to make out a will, and in this will she goes kinda hay-wire, like old folks do, sometimes; so she picks out a young feller, whose name was James Eaton Legg, a son of her sister, and wills him the X Bar 6, with the provision that within a year he be able to present proof that he is capable of runnin' this here ranch.

"And about that time she turns her affairs over to Leesom and Brand, a law firm in Chicago, who, after lookin' things over, decides that the returns from the X Bar 6 need investigatin'. It kinda looks to them as though that ranch ought to pay more dividends. Accordin' to their reports, there's too many cows out here, and not enough revenue.

"They takes it up with the Cattle Association of this here State, the same of which sends me and Sleepy up here to work on the round-up and send in a tally of the X Bar 6. It appears that Jimmy Legg accidentally drifts in here, tryin' make a cowpuncher out of himself; and our friend Barnhardt, knowin' that Jimmy might beat him out of a lot of money, decides to put him out of commission.

"And I'm not sure, but I think Mr. Barnhardt stole one of my letters from the Chicago lawyers, and found out what we was doin' here; so he plants dynamite under the bunk-house, after he misses two well-meant shots. Oh, he was a friendly sort of a jigger. Now, Barnhardt, tell us yore story."

But the Blue Wells attorney merely goggled, trying to deny it all with a shake of his head.

"You planned to make a getaway, yuh know," smiled Hashknife. "Yore little vacation was goin' to be permanent, but I cracked yore safe the night before, because I knew yuh wouldn't go away broke, and I wanted time to land the train robbers. Yeah, I've got all yore stuff. It'll send yuh over for a long time."

"This is funny," said Tex Alden. "I had a letter from that same firm, askin' me a few questions. It kinda looked to me as though Barnhardt was playin' crooked; so I held out that eight thousand and faked a loss to Antelope Neal, who was in on the game with me. I wanted to see if Barnhardt was crooked enough to doctor the books for me, but he was pretty shrewd, and I really got afraid he might have me arrested for embezzlement and put me in pretty bad; so me and Neal marked all those bills and I gave 'em back to him."

Hashknife held out his hand to Tex.

"I couldn't figure yuh out for quite a while," said Hashknife smiling.

"Barnhardt sure tried to put me in bad, Hartley. He told me about that pay-roll comin' in, because he thought I'd do anythin' to pay him back that eight thousand, and he also wanted his split of the thirty thousand dollars."

Jimmy had gone to the house, and now he came staggering back, followed by Geonimo, barking joyfully. The sheriff turned from handcuffing Barnhardt, and stared at the dog.

"We had him in the cellar," laughed Hashknife. "He's the dog that was on the express car, and Jimmy Legg is the big burly who fought with the messenger."

The boys crowded around Jimmy, slapping him on the back; which, under the circumstances, did not appeal to Jimmy, who was just beginning to find out how sore he really was.

"Lemme alone, you man-chasers!" he yelped. "I was tough for an hour or so, but I'm sure tender now."

"Talks like a cowpuncher," said Eskimo gravely.

"Looks like a cowpuncher," added Johnny.

"Fights like one," groaned Dug Haley. "When yuh get through throwin' bouquets, I wish you'd take me to a doctor."

Hashknife grinned at the wreck of what had been James Eaton Legg, the bookkeeper, and nodded solemnly.

"I reckon we'll be able to tell Leesom and Brand that Jimmy Legg has qualified," he said earnestly.

"And if I was Jimmy Legg, I'd put on some clothes," said Sleepy. "Cowboy, yo're a fright."

Jimmy grinned, started toward the house, followed by Marion. But Jimmy shoved her ahead of him, because he just remembered that he had slid half-way down Broken Cañon, sitting down. Tex looked after them, a half-smile on his face, as he turned to Hashknife.

The posse was putting the bodies in the ranch wagon, and two of the men were assisting the sheriff, who had put Dug Haley on the wagon-seat, and was helping the dazed lawyer to mount his sway-backed horse. The handcuffs bothered Barnhardt, and he was breathing like an asthmatic.

"You don't act very sore about it," said Hashknife, nodding toward where Marion and Jimmy were disappearing into the house.

Tex shrugged his shoulders.

"I know when I'm whipped," he said, with just a trace of bitterness in his voice. "It seems that Legg didn't. If yuh want me to sign that affidavit, regardin' his ability, bring it around. Leesom and Brand know I wouldn't be fool enough to wish him on to me as a boss, unless he was capable—and I'll teach him all I know."

"That's square enough," nodded Hashknife. "Wait until I saddle my bronc, and I'll ride to Blue Wells with yuh. Me and Sleepy have got to peddle a couple of horses before that train pulls through."

"Yo're not leavin' so soon, are yuh?"

Marion and Jimmy were coming from the ranch house, and with them was Nanah, her head bandaged up. Geronimo circled them, barking with joy. Jimmy was clad in a baggy pair of overalls and a shirt three sizes too large for him. The face-washing operation had opened the cuts on Jimmy's face, and he was beginning to look like a war-path Indian.

"We'll all three ride in the buggy," said Marion. "Jimmy is too weak and sore to ride a horse, and Nanah won't."

Tex offered to hitch up the horse, and Marion went with him to the stable. Hashknife drew Jimmy aside.

"I reckon you've made good, Jimmy," Hashknife said slowly. "I'll see that the right report goes to Leesom and Brand. You'll marry and settle down on the X Bar 6, I reckon, eh?"

"Marry and settle down?"

"Yeah—sure. You'll marry her, won't yuh?"

"Marion? Why—"

Jimmy hesitated, his eyes turning toward the stable door, where Marion and Tex were standing. Marion was looking down at the ground, but now she looked up at him, a smile on her face. Tex started to reach toward her, realized that he had an audience, and they both stepped inside the stable. Jimmy grinned and shook his head.

"Why, no, I don't reckon I will, Hashknife. That whips me."

And Jimmy wondered why Hashknife laughed so suddenly and walked to his horse. He did not know that Tex had admitted defeat, too. When the buggy, with its three occupants started up the road toward Blue Wells, with Tex Alden riding beside it, far in the distance they could see a lone rider—Hashknife Hartley, riding swiftly to join Sleepy, that they might dispose of their horses and catch the first train out of town. Their work was done—and the other side of the hill was calling.

TEXTS

By the Author of "Ulysses"

L. Paul

OUR cemetery lay in a fold of the hills; there were pools of shadow among old stones, raw earth heaped up across the new and narrow grave. I was sixteen, and we were burying my mother.

We were Anglicans. But our clergyman was absent, as was the ritual we knew. In their place a minister who talked and talked, garbling texts.

Eyes downcast, I saw but trodden grass, each bruised blade bent to pattern, and heard but fragments of the good man's talk.

"To this must we all come—verily we shall pass by and shall see her no more—"

And I thought:

"All her life she has lived here, within the boundaries of her narrow, narrow world. Now she has gone, she who might have seen so much, might have journeyed so far."

And my young memory went back over the brief years.

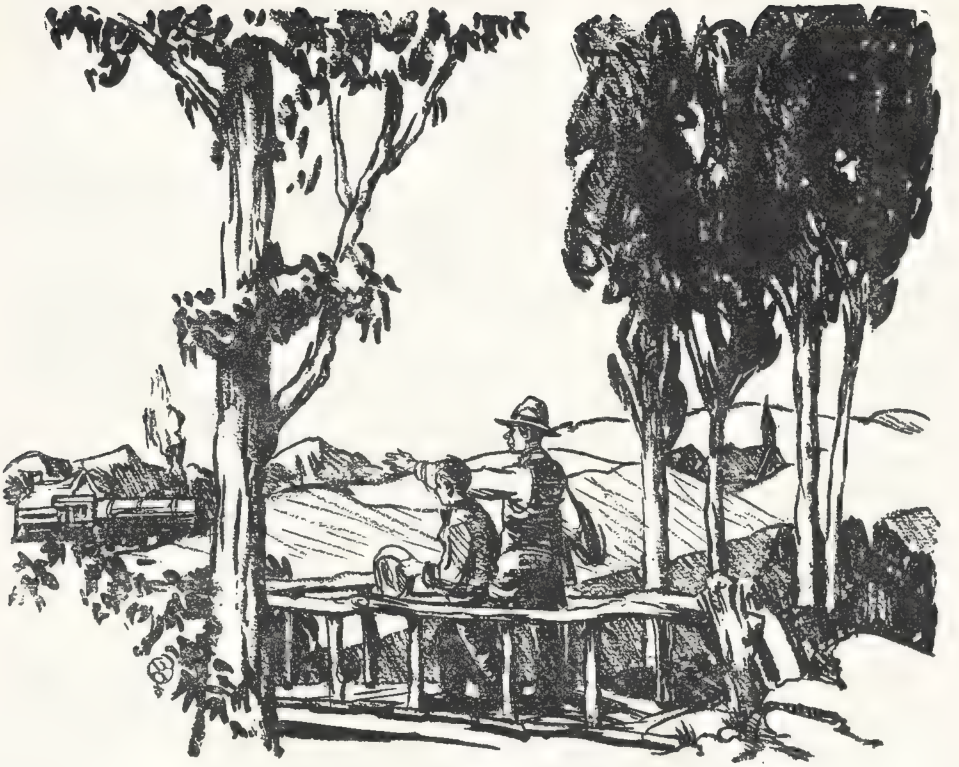
There was nothing of my mother in me. Rather I resembled my father, a tall man who wandered about the world at will, who came at long intervals to our New Brunswick farm, bringing happiness to none but me, his son, and great trouble and fear to these others, my relations. It was my father whom I resembled, or hoped to resemble. There was in me some spark that burned. And my mother it was who sensed this. I could remember how her stubborn eyes probed me as if to seek this spark out, that it might be quenched. And now she was gone. And now I was afraid, afraid that, fanned no more by her silent, relentless enmity, that spark would die.

I was afraid of Uncle Abner—tight, shiny boots, thick-soled, on my right. I was afraid of Aunt Emily, his sister—elastic congress shoes to my left. I was afraid of my grandfather—bright cane ferrule and overlong, baggy trousers across the grave; most of all did I fear him, for, being blind, he, perhaps, saw more of those unseeable things, my soul and my ambition.

And the minister's voice droned out—

"Let us lift our eyes to the hills, whence cometh our aid."

And I looked up. And black against the setting sun, walking with great strides, came my father down the slope.



We sat, that night, in the parlor; all red plush and shiny oak, that airless room. My tall father breathed deep as if near to suffocation. Now and then his eyes would travel from the walrus tusk in the corner to the three scrolled sea-shells on the hearth. But the walrus tusk had now no aura of romance about it.

The far-faring ancestor who had brought it home had afterward compromised with tradition. He lay in our cemetery instead of resting fathoms deep beneath the arctic ice as ghostly sealers should. It had been his single rebellion against our static nature, that voyage, a thing to be ashamed of. The sea-shells? They still whispered faintly when you held them to your ears. Yet the parlor had made them pessimistic.

"Ere ye see it, the ocean shall be dry," was their message now.

So my father's eyes would drift back from a walrus tusk grown conventional as a plush-covered chair, from sea-shells as domesticated as the plaster cat on the mantel; would drift back to that human document, my blind grandfather's face.

"It was downright kind o' ye to write," said my father.

"'Twas my duty. I done it. Ye have kept your bargain," my grandfather answered.

And from the way my Uncle Abner edged forward on his chair I knew that we were approaching matters of importance.

"'Tis a bargain can be kept further" my spinster Aunt Emily said harshly.

"Of that we must talk," my father lifted his eyes, looked at her for a long moment. Because she was my mother's sister, she, I think, had always hated him. She never understood that oil and water could not mix, that such happiness as either my father or mother could hope for must come to them apart, that one does not yoke an eagle to a plough.

"Fair is fair," said my father, at last. "'Twas a bargain 'tween her that's gone, and me."

"'Twas her son, not yours," my aunt replied hotly, but my grandfather lifted one blue-veined hand and she fell silent, biting the corner of her handkerchief.

"You have kept your promise fair," he went on. "You have left the lad with her—with us, Roger Thorne. We Upshants ha' little to thank ye for. But fair is fair. Ye ha' done that much."

"You have made the life of her that's gone a hell," said my Aunt Emily, half rising from her chair and reaching toward my father with fingers like talons. "You that married her, and deserted her—"

"I did what I must," my father did not lose his temper. His voice never varied from its deep, steady pitch. "I ha' walked the ways o' the world. But I ha' left her where she would be."

"Ye walked alone," my grandfather put in with the air of a man striving to be just. "Ye ha' left her son with her. Many a man'd not ha' done as much."

"Aye, I ha' walked alone—for she had need o' him," my father agreed. "But now—"

"Now you'd filch him, glitter his eyes till he's blind," my Aunt Emily persisted. "Lead him forth all 'mazed and make a tramp of him."

"Like seed like plant. I could ha' had him—any time this five year past—just by whistlin' him to heel," my father answered.

And "Peace, Emily, lass." My grandfather tapped the floor with his cane. "Now we make a new bargain," said he.

"A new bargain," my father agreed, and Uncle Abner drew his chair nearer the small square table, pushed the lamp aside and spread a blueprint out.

"Here's the farm—his," said Uncle Abner and nodded towards blind grandfather. "Here's mine, next to it. Neither chick nor child. And I'm gettin' on. 'Twill be the lad's. I'll give ye writings for that."

My father looked at me long. Then spread one great hand out over that blueprint, almost blotting out those two broad farms.

"A bargain's a bargain" said my father. "And fair is fair. Ye may show him your world. After—" and paused.

"After—" my grandfather prompted.

"I'll show him mine," said my father.

WE WALKED along the snake fence, Uncle Abner creaking on ahead, I at his heels. Down by the farmhouse we could see my grandfather and my father on the bench before the door, waiting.

"Fallow this year. Come spring 'twill grow oats." My Uncle Abner paused beside brown earth on the hill-top. "Year by year, Jamie, ha' ye ever thought o't? The first Upshant cleared it. The next broke sod. Others planted this an' that, root an' grain, or left it fallow—an' all that ye may raise a crop o' oats'll 'stonish folks hereabouts. So wi' all the two farms, field by field. Our sweat an' our toil through the years, a-plantin' an' preparin' that ye may reap."

I saw, but said nothing.

We crossed the fence and picked our way down hill through tussocks of grass. Quiet cattle grazed here, fifty head.

"Year by year we bred 'em—no finer beasts this side the sea." My Uncle Abner sighed. "Yet there's more to be done. Milkers, there ain't better. But beef, now: a leetle lackin' in weight they be. Oh, Jamie, lad. If a man could live but twice his span, what I'd do wi' yon. But ye will see to it, Jamie." And led the way across brown earth to his own neat bachelor house of stone.

"They said we couldna' raise them," my Uncle Abner smiled. "But we know better. There they be. Prunin' an' plantin' an' ploughin' done it. They'll be bearin' come two more summers, Jamie. What do ye think o' that? Apples such as never was seen here, red fruit in the green leaves. 'Twas persistence done it. Ye see one settin' o' trees. Five went before till we found the right stock. Adventure?" and he raised his voice, "Does yon ganglin' man wi' his world for a path ha' adventures such as this?" and walked on.

Now my Uncle Abner was a clever man. Before we had encompassed the two farms I was all turmoil within. For he read new meanings into every shoot, every field. There was in him a blessed imagination. And had he dressed the part he might have won me, did perhaps for the moment, despite his creaking, clumping boots and his dull-black ill-fitting suit. But as he talked I noticed those hands still curved as if to grip the plough, and as the hours passed I caught him glancing back towards his own house where the hired boy would soon drive in those fat cattle to the milking, and I knew that his mind was straying from the homily, that the gleam of romance would fade with the advent of accustomed toil.

And we came at last to our lane. Those two still figures sat waiting upon the bench before the door. And my Uncle Abner pointed at them.

"One o' yon can write his check in four figures," said he. "T'other—he've been thrun off trains 'cos he couldn't pay immigrant fare," and he smiled a thought smugly. "One o' them's barked at by the very dogs," said my Uncle Abner. "T'other, if he'd not lost his sight'd be sittin' in legislature this day.

"I'm a warm man myself" said Uncle Abner. "I got great possessions—and the load o' them's heavy on me. If I'd a lad comin' after, I'd lighten my burden—and he'd ha'no wait 'fore there was dollars in his pocket."

And up the slope my father rose as we came.

"You ha' shown the lad the metes and bounds o' your world," said my father. "You ha' navigated t'univarse, Abner, from coast to coast. 'Tis still light. I'll gi' him a glimpse o' mine."

"Where are we going?" I asked, but my father walked past us towards the highway, nor said a single word more.

Yet I followed at his heels as one about to glimpse marvels.

WE PASSED across the highroad and down a lane that became romantic now my father walked it. We crossed a wooden bridge and beneath our feet gritted the cinders of the railroad grade.

Down the track rose smoke, straight upward. Down the track, a blotch of black, was an engine. Behind it on the long siding, stretched as far as eye could reach, was car after car, the extra freight, red boxes, black gondolas, gaily painted tanks, till at the limit of vision rose the squat cupola of the caboose.

"'Twill serve," said my father. "Aye, 'twill serve, Jamie."

"Serve for what?" I asked.

"For a text" my father answered and quickened his stride, head up, nostrils working. And I followed.

Black oily overalls they wore, those two men who tended the giant engine. One of them probed deep into its hissing vitals with a long spouted can, oiling some secret weakness that none but he knew. The other wiped polished rods with waste, and grinned as we came by. My father nodded and walked on. But he with the oil can drew his head out of tangled machinery and hailed him.

"Yonder-bound Roger!" he cried. "What do ye so far east?"

"'Tis a name I have, among others," my father whispered, and spun on his heel, to clasp the oily man's hand.

I stood by while they talked, though their language was almost foreign to my country ears. Till at last the engineer threw a question at my father—

"And ha' ye seen Randy Buck the Shack? Since we rolled into Calgary?"

"Randy Buck?" I forgot even the magic of my father's new name. "Randy Buck the Shack?" I did not know, then, that he was but a boomer brakeman. I pictured him as some great man going up and down the highways of the world engaged in great enterprises worthy of that name. I fancy my father read my mind, and was eager to end the conversation on a high note. For he bade them good-by and walked on. And, crowding back the questions on my lips, I followed.

We passed two flat cars, then a gondola.

"Yon's seen hunkies sweatin' at the mines," said my father. "But here's what ye may understand, bein' a farmer," and he slid back the half-open door of an empty box car.

We clambered in. The floor was dusty. But he thrust his hand down and scooped. In his open palm lay grains of wheat.

"Number one hard." My father looked at it. "Ye grow not that kind hereabouts, lad," and dropped it, grain by grain into my hands.

"The prairies"—his eyes half closed—"the prairies, lad. Ye should see them, mile after mile, flat as the sea—and the wheat, tall, heavy-headed, waitin', waitin'. Then men cuttin' it, bindin' it—ye'd swear if all the world worked day and night they'd never beat Jack Frost—and afterwards the stacks an' the threshin'—an' the fires like stars in a stubble-brown heaven, far as eye can reach, as we burn the straw—" and "Come," said my father and dropped out on the cinders again.

We walked on.

"Tanks," and my father paused by a giant cylinder on wheels. "Oil is where ye find it, they say, lad, and most onlikely spots they picks on. Texas, lad. This tank's seen Texas, as I have, for there's oil there, and men, gamblin' health, wealth, an' strength against sand an' rock an' water. Aye, oil is where ye find it."

And I looked at the sun setting in the west. It was high in the Texas sky even as we passed on down that freight train.

We came to another box car and a strange smell greeted us. Hot oil, and smoke and steam. And men bent over something that hissed with heat.

"Hot box," said my father. "Lad, dear, ye ha' no idea what place hot boxes ha' had in my life. Many's the time I ha' waked in my side-door Pullman—a car like yon—when a hot box stops the train; and ha' looked on strange land and found it good; and, not bein' a railroad man, nor rail bound, Jamie, what's to prevent me—or us—goin' to see what lies over the next hill? Aye, hot boxes ha' their uses in my world, Jamie. Everything ha' its uses, even yon toilin' man wi' the oil an' waste, who's a shack, though there's them calls him a brakie. But come—" and we walked to the end of the train.

The caboose stood high, seemed foreshortened with its cupola above it. My father nodded to the conductor who sat on the steps, and squeezed past him and entered.

The conductor smiled, got up, and followed us inside. Between them was some bond I failed to recognize. But it must have been strong. For the conductor looked at me and grinned.

"Not too old yet, I reckon," said he and opened his lunch box.

He passed me a slab of cold pie. I took it.

"Where might ye be from?" my father asked, and the conductor answered, "Edmundston."

"Pie from Edmundston—think o' that, Jamie," my father sat down on the broad locker along one wall, and fondled a short clay pipe. "Food from far places, Jamie lad. Ye should taste the oranges in Californy."

"There's somethin' to be said for them," the conductor was a stout man in shirt sleeves and last year's best blue serge trousers, already giving at the seams. Even I could see that food was his favorite topic. "Have ye et terrypin new caught?"

"Or chicken, New Orleans style," said my father, who saw this, too. He kept one eye on the plug he sliced, one eye on me.

"Or a Niagary peach—"

"Or them salmon, fresh from the Pacific—man, dear, I ha' seen them, thick as thick; ye could walk 'em as a bridge."

"Or—" and they wandered on, linking wonderful geography with food fit for gods.

I ate that pie. I have yet to taste better.

IT WAS darkening when we dropped from that caboose and walked slowly back toward the farm through fields where frogs and crickets sang. And the night seemed touched with magic, for the curtain of darkness, descending, was no curtain after all, but a boundless horizon toward which strange wonders lifted themselves up. And long roads struck off where roads had never been before, and at the end of each its rainbow.

We came to the house. My grandfather still sat there by the door of the house that had been so long my home. My Uncle Abner, clad once more in workaday clothes was talking to him:

"Young heifer's doin' right well. I've a mind to give her a bit grain. Pigs is ready to kill most any time. Pork's up on St. John Market, so they say—" and he stared at me with ogre-like eyes.

"Fresh pork, Jamie lad. We'll have fresh pork, come Sunday."

But my blind grandfather did not seem to be listening.

"You ha' seen our world, Jamie lad," said he, and once more I saw the mettle of him, the striving to be fair.

"I ha' seen it all," I answered.

"The metes and bounds. He has been to its horizon," my father put in.

"And ye ha' seen his," my grandfather went on.

"I ha' showed him the edge o't." My father, too, could be fair. "But I ha' talked, Squire, aye, I ha' talked. And such a text I had to my sermon, like a preacher dinging at heaven an' forgettin' hell. For 'tis not all like that, Jamie, lad. There's journeys afoot in rain and mud, wi' your belt close to your backbone. There's shacks will sling ye off on the ballast. There's the lonely feel that comes at times when all turns stale—"

"Some hates tramps." My Aunt Emily had come out of the house, was edging nearer.

"Aye, tramps—" my father admitted. "Ye might call me that—"

My grandfather brought matters back to the business in hand.

"Ye ha' seen, Jamie lad. Ye must choose."

I hesitated. I could feel the tension. In her own way my aunt loved me. She saw in me her sister, my mother. Which proved that even Aunt Emily had imagination.

My Uncle Abner hoped to make of me what he would himself have become, could he have attained that double span for which he sighed. As for my father, he had put his feelings into one sentence when he sat in the parlor the night before—

"Aye, I ha' walked alone—"

Only my old blind grandfather seemed detached, remote from stress or strain. He was, I fancy, past life, save as a wise judge. Most of him was in that grave where my mother waited. Whatever my decision he would not live long to suffer or to profit by it.

A train hooted, that very train we had seen. Against the dark sky bloomed suddenly a flower of crimson and velvet-black, flame and smoke as the engine blower vomited. The lights of the caboose slid behind trees, came out again, twinkled down the line to become a distant pin-point, fading slowly.

I stood silent. My father, tall, gaunt, like a statue, waited. My Aunt Emily mumbled tags and tatters of broken speech, trying, pitifully, to find the one right sentence that could convince me. My Uncle Abner sought to straighten toil-bent shoulders as if to prove he was yet the man he had been, as if resenting my father's figure, standing there straight as an arrow.

It was my grandfather who read my thoughts, sensed my decision, turning his blind face westward as he made things easier for me by saying—

"Get ye gone, get ye gone, Jamie lad. Ye ha' been a good son to me; be as good to him."

And as my aunt began to speak coherently at last, as Uncle Abner slumped once more into accustomed curve of shoulder, as my father sought to hide his triumph, my old blind grandfather rose and turned toward the house.

"Go where ye must," said my grandfather. "But, Jamie, lad, ye canna outrun our love."

And though the magic roads still stretched forth like spokes of a wheel, though I knew I must follow each to its end, yet the rainbows at their extremities were hidden suddenly in mist.

THE GOOD WOUND

by Leonard H. Nason

I WAS fortunate enough to receive a good wound. I was shot in the abdomen and a man with that kind of wound either dies almost immediately or gets entirely well, provided he can keep the different doctors through whose hands he passes from cutting him open again to see what the other doctors have done. Every new surgeon that got hold of me after the first time, announced that as soon as the wound cleared a bit he was going to open me up again and have a look.

I always replied in the same words—that if I lived I would hunt that doctor down no matter where he hid himself, and that I would kill him if I were hanged for it the next day. There was no doubt that I meant it, so they left me alone.

A soldier, however, who had been shot through the arm or leg and had had an injury to the bone, would have to have the injured limb strapped to a frame until it healed. Before the man was allowed to go home his arm would have to be broken again and reset, so that it would not be stiff.

There was a man who went home with me who told me his arm had been broken four times in as many different hospitals and he still carried it on a kind of shelf at right angles to his body. There was a man in my ward who had a hole through his leg and he suffered terribly every time the dressings were changed. They whittled and whittled at his leg, taking him out to the cutting room about every two weeks and finally took his leg off altogether. The poor lad finally died.

It was shortly after this time that another tentative effort was made to operate on me, but I put up such a row that the operation was postponed. The surgeon whom I disappointed never forgave me and told me that nothing would please him more than to see me die. I recovered just to spite him.

JUKES

The story of a Sailor

by a man who has been one

Bill Adams

A BOARDING master's boat was alongside by the fore rigging. The boarding master and his crimp were bringing off the crew; helping the drunken sailors over the bulwarks, and shoving or dragging them into the forecastle.

Alf Jukes came over the bulwarks last. He came without assistance. He was drunk, as were all his fellows, but his drunkenness took a different turn to theirs. As he jumped to the deck he saw the ship's mate by the mainmast.

His attitude revengeful and defiant, Alf Jukes strode up to the mate. He stood face to face with him, and cursed him.

The mate paid no attention at all to Alf Jukes. He had heard the same thing, had seen the same thing, too many times from such men as Jukes. He looked at Jukes as unconcernedly as if he looked at a coil of rope or a barrel of tallow.

As the mate turned disinterestedly away, Jukes addressed himself to the ship. Scornfully scanning her from boom to taffrail, from deck to mastheads, from yard-arm to yard-arm, he cursed her. As if exasperated by her silence, as if maddened by her dignity, he raised his voice higher and higher. Like the mate, the ship paid no heed to him. The wind in her rigging whispered of clean things.

Alf Jukes lifted his eyes to the serene and cloudless sky. Craning his neck, seeming to tiptoe a little, hands clenched and arms upraised, he shouted curses. No answer came from the sky.

Jukes ceased his cursing and walked to the forecastle, in which his comrades were now gathered. Having put the last senseless seaman aboard, having collected from the skipper the price prearranged for them, having pocketed a month's advance pay for each one of them, the boarding master with his crimp was already well on the way ashore. The tug was alongside the ship. The ship's mate leaned on the bulwark, and talked with the tugboat men.

Presently the skipper appeared and spoke to the mate, who walked forward and called the sailors from the forecastle.

Alf Jukes came last from the forecastle. Like all his comrades, he reeked of cheap and abominable liquor, but, unlike them, he

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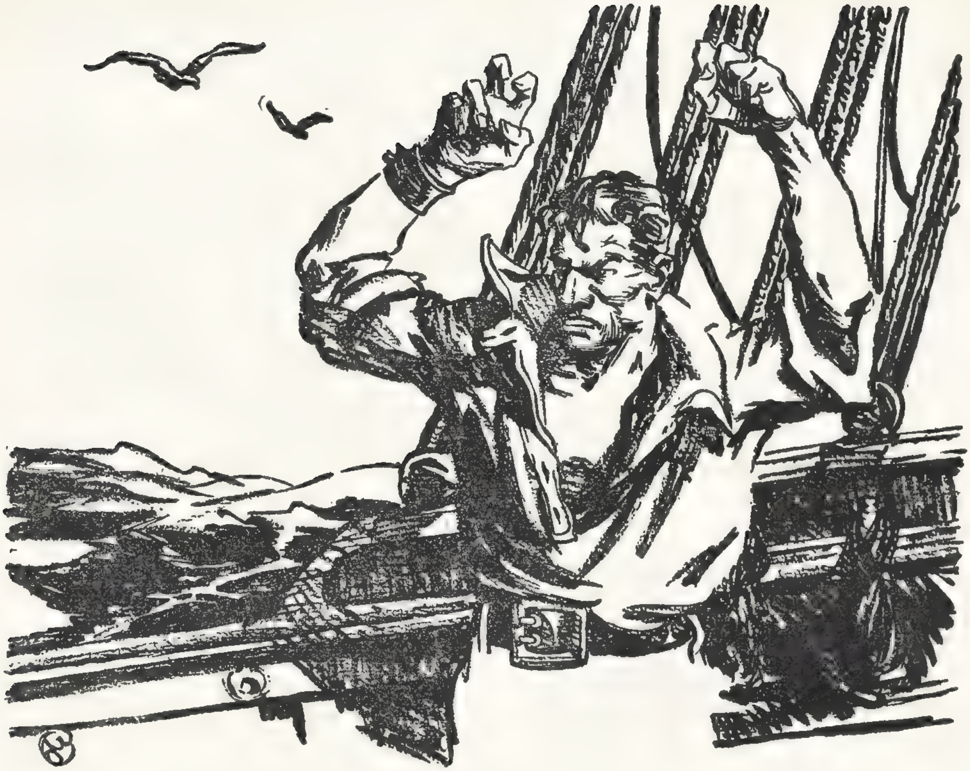


walked erect and steadily, a fierce remonstrance in his step and bearing. They staggered, cursed, or grumbled listlessly. Some were tall, some short; some wide, some narrow; some bearded, others not. They were of many nations. Some wore dungarees, others shoddy cloth; one, a pair of trousers made of ship's canvas; his upper body covered by a threadbare oilskin jacket. Some wore old cloth caps; one, a battered sun-downer; another a dented derby.

Jukes towered above his comrades. His curly brown head and bony feet were bare. His worn dungaree shirt was unbuttoned. His neatly patched dungaree trousers were gathered by a broad brass-buckled belt. His forearms, hands, and throat were rugged. His breast showed white through his unbuttoned shirt. It looked cold, like marble.

Alone of all the crew, Jukes did not look besotted. The stamp of the sea was on him as on them. But the shore had stamped him less. He scowled toward the shore as he followed his comrades from the forecastle.

Impelled almost as much by instinct as by the brief command of the mate, the crew ascended to the forecastle head, took the windlass bars from their rack and set them in their places. As they leaned their weight upon them some grunted like pigs. Some laughed stupidly. Jukes alone was silent.

The ship lifted a little to the tide beneath her. A flag at her peak fluttered. A wisp of smoke passed over her as the tugboat steamed ahead.

The crew stamped slowly round and round the windlass, heaving the anchor in. The cable clanked at the hawse pipe. Tide and cable spoke of clean and windy things.

The reek of liquor grew fainter. The wind came fresher. The mate said—

"Some one sing!"

One of the sailors began to sing a forecastle song, a chantey, a ballad with a wailing chorus. His voice, at first spiteful, sneering, and contemptuous, the voices of the others, also at first spiteful, sneering and contemptuous, became presently attuned to the sounds of wind and tide and cable. They no longer cursed, or grunted like pigs.

The stamp of the shore was falling from them.

The ship passed swiftly from the harbor heads. The tugboat let go her tow-line. Some of the men went aloft, to loose sail. Talking in low voices, others waited by sheet and halyard; ready to hoist when the mate's order came. Jukes stood apart, detached, solitary, brooding. He looked like a bear lately released from an unclean cage, and still uncertain of its freedom.

The mate called—

"Hoist away, main tops'l!"

The men grasped the halyards and lay back, setting their weight upon them. Straining to raise the heavy sail, they failed. They tried, and failed again.

"You there! Lend a hand here!" called the mate to Jukes.

The men waited while Jukes slowly approached. As he laid hold on the rope he seemed to shake himself. He drew a long deep breath. He reached up, higher and higher. His great chest expanded.

The mate called—

"All together, now!—*Lay back!*"

The tackle rattled noisily through its three-fold blocks. The sail slid, threshing and filling, to its masthead.

"Bully boy!" said the mate.

A sailor repeated—

"Bully boy!"

Jukes remained silent, somber, browbeclouded. While sail on sail was spread, the crew all hauling to his leadership, he took no notice of any one or anything. He paid no heed at all to their admiring comments.

The shore line faded astern. The day passed. The sun sank. Night fell.

The sailors sat in the forecastle.

" 'Ow long was you ashore?" asked one.

"Three days. How long was you?" came the reply.

"I come in the same day as you then. I been three days ashore."

"We was five months at sea," said the other, "three days in port, an' I don't know nothin' about 'em."

The dozen sailors discussed their stays in port. Not one of them had been ashore over five days. Each had accepted a drink from the boarding master's bottle. Between then and now no one of them knew aught of what had taken place.

"We was two hundred days on the passage out," said one. "We was posted missin'. Four days in port, an' back to sea agin!"

They were from half a dozen different ships.

"How long was you ashore?" asked one, turning to Jukes. Jukes seemed not to hear him.

"He don't know," laughed one.

"We don't none of us know much, or we'd not be here," another grumbled.

"After this v'yage I quits the sea," another asserted.

"Me, too," another.

"Yuss!— You will!" chuckled a third.

"I'll do wot I please," retorted the other.

"Same as you always 'ave! Me, too," another said. "Haw, haw, haw!"

Turning to Jukes the last speaker asked—

"Wot will you do w'en she gits in, ol' matey?"

Jukes rose and left the forecastle. For a long time he sat motionless on the bulwark, his head bowed, his great hands upon his knees, his figure dim against the starry sky. When eight bells struck and his comrades started aft to answer to the muster roll he crossed the deck and reentered the forecastle. His step seemed to falter as he neared the dingy lamp. Looking about him to make sure that he was all alone, he drew from a pocket a small oilskin package; untied and took from it a faded kerchief—an old bandanna. Loosening the knots, he drew from its crumpled folds an envelope. The envelope, drab and dirty like the kerchief that protected it, bore the mark of a distant port, and of a yet more distant date.

A picture but little larger than a postage stamp fell to the table and lay face up. The letter, dog-eared and torn from much handling, was like the picture—common place, yet smiling and hopeful. As Jukes looked hungrily at the picture his face grew haggard. His lips moved as he read the old letter over.

Startled by a shout from the quarterdeck, Jukes thrust letter and picture back within the bandanna, folded the oilskin about them, and hurried out to answer to his name.

A MONTH was gone. Barefooted, bare of arm, Jukes walked from the wheel. The sunset glowed in his weathered face. The sails above him shone. Below him shone the sea. He gave the course to the mate and went to join his fellows on the hatch.

"A fine man that, Mister," said the skipper to the mate.

" 'Ow would you like to 'ave a little place ashore?" asked one sailor of another on the hatch.

"I ain't goin' to sea no more after this passage," answered the other.

Jukes lighted his pipe and sat among them. The sea was blue-black; the sky blue-black above. Whispering from horizon to horizon the sea crests murmured of clean free windy things.

" 'Ow would you like to 'ave a little place ashore?" asked the last speaker of Jukes.

Jukes turned and faced the man. His eyes shining and eager, he drew the oilskin package from his pocket. They gathered round him as he opened it. They passed the picture from hand to hand.

"I wisht as I was 'im," muttered one and another.

They looked at him enviously, seated serene and confident among them.

ANOTHER month was gone.

A canopy of cloud hung low over the mastheads. It was without break, or rift, uniform from horizon to horizon. It was of that cold gray that presages snow. Because it was uniform it seemed to be without motion. Beneath it the cañon hollows of the sea were black. From horizon to horizon white sea cataracts roared.

Every two hours a sailor peered from the forecastle. Watching his opportunity, leaving those behind him to close the door, he sprang to the deck. Now running a few steps, now desperately clinging to the wire-tight life-line, now leaping high into the rigging to escape the raging sea, he battled a slow way to the wheel; whence the helmsman whom he relieved made an equally precarious passage to the forecastle.

It was midday when Alf Jukes opened the forecastle door. Unlike the others, he did not hesitate, or pause to scrutinize the chances of the deck. Though in the past two days no man aboard had slept, there was no sign of weariness about him. As he opened the door he looked with a casual but comprehensive glance to the gale-whipped and snow-laden sky. Then, stepping to the waist-deep smother of the forward deck, he turned and deliberately banged the door behind him. Head unbowed, gaze straightforward, light hands upon the rigid life-line, he strode sure-footed through the tempest's rage. When an insweeping sea completely submerged him, the mate, who was watching from by the helmsman's side, made for the chart room and bellowed to the skipper. Jukes's head and shoulders reappeared as the skipper leaped out to the poop deck.

The groan of the ship's hull, the creak and outcry of a hundred straining blocks, the clack of chains and parrals, were inaudible. Had the three masts simultaneously splintered and gone over the side not a sound would have been heard.

The skipper and mate looked amusedly into each other's faces. Alf Jukes's shoulders, his gripping hands, his arms, the every motion of his entirely reckless body, appeared as the limbs and motions of a gamboling schoolboy. By the toss of his chin, by the shake of his head, by the partings and closings of his stubble-surrounded lips, the universe might observe that Jukes, on his way to relieve the wheel, was singing.

Pointing to the helmsman, the skipper yelled an order into the mate's ear. The mate nodded. Waylaying the man, the mate dragged him into the chart room. So ordered by mate and skipper, the exhausted helmsman sought shelter in the chart house instead of attempting to reach the forecastle.

When sailors looked from the forecastle door to see what was become of Jukes, or of the man whom he had gone to relieve, it was to see the mate gesticulating to them to go back; voicelessly ordering them to remain where they were.

Afternoon passed, and no man ventured to the wheel's relief.

Toward dusk the wind fell, its uproar ending abruptly—as if a multitude of yelling maniacs had leaped from a precipice edge to instant extinguishment. The crests of the sea died down. The horizons widened. For a little while gray ocean rolled under gray sky.

Snow fell. The horizons were blotted out.

Skipper and mate descended to the saloon. Jerking the door of the steward's pantry open, the skipper shouted for the steward. A trap-door in the pantry deck opened slowly and the steward, who had lain hidden below, arose. His teeth chattered. For a moment he looked dazedly up at the skipper; then, realizing that the storm was over, that the ship still floated, and that it was long since he had served a meal, passed out to the deck and made haste to the cook's galley.

"We'll set sail when the moon rises," said the skipper to the mate.

Skipper, mate, steward, cook, and sailors, buried their noses in pannikins of steaming coffee. Ravenously devouring hash made of pork scraps mixed with pulverized sea biscuit, they forgot the fury of the recent storm, forgot that it was snowing—forgot Alf Jukes.

The ship rolled easily. Blocks whined. Sails flapped. A pleasant odor of tobacco smoke arose in cabin, galley and forecastle.

The clouds lifted. The snow ceased. A wan light illumined deck and rigging.

"Loose them upper tops'ls!" bawled the mate.

Some of the sailors climbed aloft to cast the gaskets off. Others gathered at the halyards, ready to hoist away. Snow, disturbed by the feet of the climbers, fell on the heads and shoulders of those below. Flapping their arms, shaking their fists, the men on deck swore at the climbers, who, envying them the comparative comfort of the deck, replied with gibes and curses.

A man aloft called—

"All ready on the main!"

The mate said—

"Hoist away!"

The men lay back, straining on the stiff swollen rope. The sail refused to move.

"W'ere's Alf?" asked one of the sailors.

"Jukes!" called the mate, "Jukes!"

They looked aloft, seeking Jukes.

" 'Ee ain't aloft," said one.

"He's at the wheel," said the mate, remembering, "One o' you men relieve Jukes."

"I forgot 'im," said one.

"Me, too," another.

Alf Jukes came forward from the wheel. Snow was thick on his sou'wester, and on his shoulders. Snow was frozen on his sleeves and oilskin trousers. His hands, his lips, were blue.

"Lend a hand here, Jukes," said the mate.

Jukes strode to the halyards and reached up. His great chest expanded as he reached higher and higher.

"All together—*now!*" said the mate.

Jukes laid his weight upon the halyards. The sheaves rattled. The yard began to rise.

"Bully boy!" said the mate. A sailor grunted, "Bully boy!"

Their feet tramping soundlessly in the deep snow, the men ran the topsail to its masthead.

"All ready on the fore," called a man from aloft.

"Go eat," said the mate to Jukes, his accents crisp and clear in the stillness.

Preceding the others, Jukes walked to the fore topsail halyards as if he had not heard.

When sail was set there was neither coffee nor hash left. The cook's skilly pots and hash kids were washed, and hung on the taut wire above his stove. Jukes munched sea biscuit, and took a drink of cold water.

"That fellow Jukes is a good man, Mister," said the skipper to the mate.

"Jukey ain't afeard o' naught," said a sailor, "I wish as I was 'im."

Night passed.

A BRIGHT sun shone on the ship at anchor. Sails were furled, ropes coiled. From the fore bulwarks, the sailors watched a boat rowed by two men approaching.

Jukes sat alone upon the forecastle head. Gazing shoreward, he saw masts and spars, steeples, and roofs. Chimneys smoked. Windows glinted. Beyond the town he saw low hills, with tree-tops blowing. His eyes were hungry.

Noticing the approaching boat, Jukes rose to his feet. His teeth clenched, a scowl on his face, he paced to and fro. He looked like a bear come too close to the dwellings of men—suspicious, undetermined, afraid of the world and of himself.

Hands extended, eyes a-twinkle, faces beaming, a sailor's boarding master and his crimp climbed aboard.

"Did ye have a good voyage, boys? We're are ye from? You're come to a good port this time!"

The boarding master entered the forecastle. Seating himself, looking amicably up to the expectant and childish faces of the sailors, he drew a bottle from his pocket.

"The best, boys! I'd never offer ye any but the best."

One of them grasped the bottle.

"Don't swaller it all!" cried one of the sailors.

" 'Old 'is arm!" another.

" 'S'all right, boys. There's plenty more," grinned the boarding master.

The crimp came from the boat, bottles in his pockets.

The forecastle reeked of cheap and abominable liquor. Presently one of the sailors asked—

"W'ere's Jukey?"

The crimp left the forecastle, to seek the missing man.

"The boys wants you," said he, discovering Alf Jukes alone upon the forecastle head. He took a bottle from his pocket and held it out to Jukes.

Uttering a low coughing grunt, Jukes struck savagely at the crimp. The bottle fell, and broke upon the deck. Cursing Jukes, the crimp beat a hasty retreat.

With a half pannikin of unspilled liquor in it, the lower half of the bottle remained upright against the windlass.

Alf Jukes looked down. Nostrils quivering, fingers twitching, he uncertainly approached the broken bottle. He stooped, lifted the bottle, and stretched out a hand; as if to hurl it to the water. He hesitated; drew in his hand, and sniffed. Another moment and he flung the emptied fragment over the forecastle rail.

"Hey, Jukey! Come on down, ol' son!" called one of his comrades, looking up from the forecastle.

Jukes descended and entered the forecastle. His fellows slapped him on the back. The boarding master thrust a bottle in his hand. As Jukes took it, one of his comrades tried to snatch it from him, and a bellow of laughter rose as the sailor went sprawling on the deck.

The bottles passed around.

"No more ships for me," said one.

"Nor me, boys," said another.

Jukes drank silently.

By and by the sailors shouldered their sea-bags and followed the boarding master and his crimp from the forecastle. Jukes towering heedless among them, they shoved and elbowed one another aside, making for the boat. Pointing to other ships near-by, they cursed them. They cursed the ship they left. They chattered confidingly to the boarding master, who promised them one and all an easy job on the land. As Jukes grasped the stroke oar and set the pace ashore they shouted their approval.

"Ol' Jukey!" they cried, and "Good ol' Jukey!"

They laughed to see the way the boat drove through the water, with Jukes's great muscles surging her along. They jumped ashore, and turned their backs forever on the sea. Without a glance behind, they followed Jukes across the street; Jukes at the boarding master's heels, the crimp behind them all.

Hours passed. Besotted sailors lolled on dirty cots about a dirty room. They quarreled, forgot their quarrels, and embraced each other. They smoked, and spat, and sang. The leering crimp came in, and went, and came, and went again, and called them each by name—quick-fitted names.

" 'Ere, old Cork-fender, lap it up now! It's good for sailor's gizzards."

"Gimme yer empty glass 'ere, Queer-fellow!"

"Young Bandy-shanks, you've 'ad enough! You're young.— Another? All right, then. Wot'd yer mommer say?"

"Aw, haw! haw! haw!"

"Drink hearty, Jimmie Bilge! There's plenty more."

Ignoring their quarrels and embraces, taking no part in their noisy songs, Alf Jukes held out his glass for filling and refilling. The crimp winked at him deferentially.

Evening came. Save for loud snores, heavy breathing, and now and then a mumbled sleepy oath, the room was quiet. Steady-handed still, Jukes stood erect amidst the wreckage of his fellows and emptied his glass.

In the barroom adjoining, the boarding master reached a black bottle from beneath the bar. Alf Jukes came from the back room as he replaced it. Resolve in his face, he stepped toward the street.

Three brimming glasses stood upon the bar. Lifting one to his own lips, the boarding master pushed another out toward Jukes.

"Here, big boy! Don't run off so soon!" he quickly called.

Jukes stopped and hesitatingly looked toward the bar. The crimp and boarding master raised their glasses.

Jukes took the proffered glass, lifted, and drained it in one long straight swallow; then turned and strode toward the street door again. Midway, he staggered.

The boarding master and the crimp came from behind the bar. They lifted Jukes, carried him to the dusky street, and dumped him in their boat.

"That fills *her* crew," growled the boarding master with a nod to the riding light of a ship at anchor close inshore.

DAWN was breaking. Stars were fading. Mastheads of anchored ships swayed easily against the opening sky. A ship's mate banged upon the forecastle door, rousing his crew. A drowsy sailor lurched off to the galley, fetching the morning coffee.

"How long was you ashore?" asked one sailor of another.

"Wot day is it?" came the reply. The questioner chuckled.

Some surly, some indifferent, they sipped their coffee.

The mate looked in.

"Rouse out here, now! Get up and man that windlass!"

They straggled to the deck. But Jukes lay sleeping still, his face to the bulkhead. The mate stepped in and shook him. He wakened slowly.

"Tumble out, here, you!"

Jukes climbed from the bunk and looked about him.

"Come on, now! You're at sea, my man. Get out of here!"

With a long staggering stride, Jukes passed out to the new ship's deck. The wind blew in his hair. The tide sang by.

Jukes turned, wild-eyed, and faced the mate. Men on the forecastle head looked down and laughed to hear him curse. He gazed up at them, vacant-eyed. He looked toward the shore, saw his old ship, and shuddered.

"Come on, my man!" the mate said. "You're at sea."

Alf Jukes ascended to the forecastle head.

"Sing, some one!" said the mate, "sing and let's get her away."

A sailor leaning on a windlass bar began to sing a forecastle song, a chantey, a ballad with a wailing chorus. The tugboat's smoke whirled by. The chorus rose and fell. The cable clanked.

"W'y don't ye sing, shipmate?" a sailor asked of Jukes.

Alf Jukes let go his windlass bar. Fists clenched and arms upraised, his curses ringing loud above his comrades' song, he looked upon the shore.

"Come on, my man," the mate said. "You're at sea."

WEEKS were gone by. It was black midnight. No star shone. Sails hung invisible. Long swells rolled sluggishly beneath the keel. The ship's bow rose, dipped to deep hollows, and arose again.

Half naked in the hot night, Alf Jukes lay slumbering. The watch below slept soundly all about him. The watch on deck sat talking on the hatch without.

Sails flapped to the long roll of the ship. Chains clinked upon the lower masts. Blocks chattered squeakily. Now and again a heavy rope, a sheet or lazy tack, thud-thudded against the ship's side. The wheel cluck-clucked. The sailors' voices rose and fell, a mumble from the hatch.

Poring above a chart, the skipper sat in his chart room. Presently he rose, looked out to the dark night, listened awhile, and went below.

An hour passed.

High and sudden, the mate's voice rang above the noises of the night, and, answering quick commands, gloom-hidden sailors leaped up and rushed to the braces.

The skipper ran, pajama-clad and shouting, to the deck. The watch on deck were shouting at the ropes. A deep long grumbling roar was all about—the growl of rollers bursting on a reef.

A sailor yelled at the forecastle door, wakening the sleepers of the watch below. Blackness was like a wall. The skipper was shouting orders. The mate was shouting; the grumbling rumble coming closer, louder.

The ship quivered. A rending sound rose sharp above the roar, died, and arose again. A topmast splintered and went overboard. Torn canvas snarled. Blocks skirled. The ship slid on, settling beyond the reef.

Last from his bunk came Jukes. Striking a match he held it high, and by its feeble flare saw the crazed struggles of his comrades all yelling at the door. Fallen men clutched madly at the feet that trampled them. Water lapped into the forecastle. The match went out. The ship lurched heavily.

Jukes stepped from the emptied forecastle into water knee deep. As he slid barefooted to the rigging, the water rose to his waist. He gripped the shrouds and swung himself aloft. The water followed. He climbed, cat-nimble. The water followed close. He heard a last useless order from the skipper. Some one screamed, "The boat!" A shriek ended in a groan close to him. A hand clutched his bare foot. He bent to grasp the hand; but it slipped, and he touched only water.

Save for the growl and long wash of the sea there was no sound.

Alf Jukes was swimming.

Dawn came, and, treading water, Jukes gazed round the sea. He struck out, swam with strong steady strokes, and presently swung himself upon a piece of drifting wreckage.

The horizon was empty, the sky without a cloud. The sea was flat.

The sun rose. It beat on the bare white skin of Alf Jukes.

Jukes took a little oilskin package from his pocket and wedged it in the center of the raft. He slipped off his dungaree trousers and dipped them in the sea. The dripping dungarees in his hand, he stood stark naked and once more gazed around. The sea was empty. His head by the raft's edge, he lay down and covered himself as well as he could with the wet dungaree. The sun climbed higher.

Now and again Jukes splashed his great hands in the water, wetting his head and upper limbs afresh. Except upon the raft there was no motion anywhere in sky or sea.

By and by Jukes rose. His eyes searched the horizon. It was empty. He dropped the dungarees, and dived deep. He swam down and down, seeking the cooler depths. He glimmered white, far under the unrippled blue water. When he rose to the surface again he held to the edge of the raft. The raft gave no shade. He reached for, and covered his head with, the dungarees. The sun was overhead when he drew himself up, and, holding to the edge of the raft, looked all about again.

Suddenly Jukes hurled himself upon the raft. His body glistening in the sun, he watched a long green shape dart under him.

For the rest of the day Jukes dipped his dungarees in the sea and covered himself as best he could. All day a sharp green fin cruised slowly round. When the sun dipped there were red fiery patches on the marble-white skin of his back, on his thighs and shoulders.

Stars wakened. Long after day was gone Jukes curled himself in the middle of the raft and went to sleep. Thirst wakened him. He dipped the dungarees in the sea and wrapped them round his neck.

Night passed. At dawn the horizon was empty. Fins cruised to and fro on all sides. Snouts broke the still blue water. The sky was cloudless.

When Jukes dipped his dungarees, jaws snapped on them. He wrenched, and a leg of the dungarees remained in his hands. He wrapped it about his neck, and crouched down. The sun climbed higher.

Jukes rocked a little to and fro. Now and again a low coughing grunt escaped him.

Day passed. Night came, starry and still. Snouts nosed around the raft's edge. Fins darted to and fro, rippling the windless water. Jukes slept fitfully, dreamed, wakened, dozed and dreamed again. Night passed.

At dawn Jukes climbed unsteadily to his feet. His lips were black, his skin scarlet. He moaned. His tongue was swollen.

A quarter of a mile from the raft a dense black cloud was slowly crossing the equatorial sky. A sheer wall of water fell from the cloud to the sea. Flying fish leaped at the rain's foot. White birds preyed on them from above, silver-bellied fish from below. The snouts were gone, to join in the preying.

Staring at the rain wall, Jukes listened to the just audible *s-s-s-s* of the doldrum squall.

The squall passed by, came within an eighth of a mile of the raft, dipped under the sea rim, and was gone. The sun rode high in a blue cloudless sky. The snouts were back. Fins rippled the water all about. Jukes crouched, with the wet scrap of dungaree about his neck. Day passed. Night came.

Jukes lay prostrate, face downward. Hours passed. Long after midnight he lifted his head and tried to climb to his knees. A dim green light winked on the sea far off. He toppled over and was still. Wind ruffled his hair and blew cool upon his brow.

Alf Jukes saw houses with smoking chimneys, windows aglint. Saw masts and spars along a waterfront. Heard singing, far away. A wind blew through green tree-tops.

WHEN Jukes came to himself he lay in a lamp-lit forecastle. From near-by came the voices of sailors.

"I seen a boat wi' two dead men in her

one time. None ever knowed wot ship they was from."

"If you follers deep water long enough, it'll git ye."

"Aye. 'Ow many *old* sailors 'ave you ever seed?"

Jukes raised his head painfully and listened. From neck to ankles his body was a fiery blister.

"I been eleven blasted year at sea. I got nuthin'."

"You never will 'ave."

"W'oo cares?"

"There don't no one care. You an' me is dogs."

"This here'll be my last v'yage."

"Aye.— That's wot you says— Wait."

"Wait yerself. I'm done."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"There's one as had ought to be cured leastways," and a nod toward the forecastle.

Jukes climbed from the bunk and tottered out into the starlight.

" 'Ow are ye, matey?"

"Bring 'im some water."

Jukes gulped cold water down.

" 'Ere, mate— You 'ad it in yer 'and."

Jukes took the little oilskin package. They led him back and laid him in the bunk again. They smeared more grease on his burned limbs. They gave him more water.

"Look at 'im!—I'm done."

"Me, too."

As Jukes with fumbling fingers untied the package, they gathered round. He nodded his head. His lips moved. A sailor bent above him, listening.

" 'Ee's done. No more o' ships fer 'im."

Jukes dozed away. They passed the picture from hand to hand. They read the dog-eared letter over.

"Look at 'ere," said one, and pointed to the date.

"Three year ago! 'Ee's been a long time—"

"Shanghaied, maybe."

"Them crimps."

"I'm done."

"Haw, haw, haw! Maybe!"

IT WAS the dog-watch time. The sun was setting. Warm, pearly little clouds passed overhead. A low wind murmured.

The sailor on lookout leaned on the forecastle rail, watching his comrades on the deck below. Skipper and mate looked forward from the poop. The cook and carpenter lolled in the galley doorway.

A dozen sailors gamboled by the hatch, trying themselves, pitting their strength and skill against each others. Alf Jukes was there, with head and shoulders higher than the rest.

"Here, Jukes!" called one, a lad with an unshaven downy face, "I'll race you to the masthead!— Up and back. A pound of baccy to the winner. You take the main, and I'll go up the fore."

" 'Ere, Chips! Come on an' start 'em," called an eager sailor; and Chips, the carpenter, stepped up.

"One—two—"

"I'll bet a pound o' baccy on young Limbertoes!"

"Me, too."

Turning to the mate, the skipper said—

"The young fellow'll win."

"Aye," said the mate, "he's young. It's in his favor."

Jukes at the main, the other at the fore shrouds, stood waiting "three."

"*Three!*" snapped the carpenter.

"Go!—go!—go!"

"Go, Limbertoes! My baccy's on you!"

"Go, Jukes!— Go, Jukes!"

"Show 'im a sailor! Show 'im, Limber, now!"

Over the futtock shrouds, together, neck and neck, went Jukes and Limber.

"Two pound o' baccy—'oo takes me on? —two pound on Limber!"

"Done—an' my Sunday whack o' duff thrown in!"

"Lord!—look at that there Jukes! 'Ee's like a monkey."

"Some sailor, that," the skipper said. "Look at him go!"

"But the young man wins," the mate replied.

"Bully for Limber!"

The youngster touched a hand upon the fore royal truck a touch ahead of Jukes upon the main.

"Down!—down!—down!" roared all the sailors.

Alf Jukes came sliding down the main royal stay. Down the fore royal stay came Limbertoes.

"Come on, Limber!"

"Limber wins!"

"A tie! They're neck and neck."

"No!—Limber wins!"

A bellow rose from every sailor. Full

forty feet above the deck, Alf Jukes let go, and dropped. Hands up, and arms above his head, he fell straight as a plummet and landed on his feet.

"That fellow's like a bear," the skipper said.

"There was a feller on my last ship as'd beat both of 'em," said a sailor.

"Oh, aye! There's always fellers on a man's last ship," answered another.

"Tomorrer we'll be in, an' you'll 'ave one more last ship," another laughed.

"Jukes, was you ever beat at anything?"

Without an answer Jukes walked slowly off, and sat alone upon the bulwarks. His face was grim.

The bell struck eight. The crew strolled aft to answer to the muster roll. Last came Jukes. He looked like a bear that, peering from sheltering wilds, wonders what lies in the valleys beyond its great freedom.

SAILS were furled, ropes coiled; the ship at anchor. A chill wind thrummed in her rigging. Cold rain beat down.

The sailors sat in the forecastle, amidst them a boarding master. While they drank from his bottles, Alf Jukes paced up and down the deck outside, alone. Now and again a sailor looked from the forecastle and called to him. He paid no heed.

The boarding master's crimp came out, bottle in hand.

"The boys sent it ye, matey," said he, and held the bottle temptingly toward Jukes. Jukes answered with a growl. His great right fist shot out, and, as the bruised crimp climbed to his feet the sailors looked, laughing from the forecastle ports.

The crimp reentered the forecastle. The boarding master passed the bottles round. The sailors cursed the ship, all ships, and damned the sea. Soon, crowding at his heels, they all swarmed out, and clambered down into the boat ahead of him. Paying no heed to their loud farewells, Jukes walked up and down in the wind and the rain. Last, loitering from the forecastle, came the crimp.

The shouts of the sailors faded away. The ship was silent. The wind and the rain beat on her.

Jukes entered the deserted forecastle. It was gloomy and chill. Water dripped from him. He sat down, shivering a little. He drew out his oilskin package and untied it. Dark fell.

Presently, lighting the lamp, Jukes saw a bottle on the table. He scowled. He picked it up, and stepped to the door. The wind soughed drearily. The rain whipped by. He hesitated in the doorway, the bottle in his outstretched hand.

A boat drew noiselessly alongside the ship. The boarding master and his crimp climbed back aboard, and peered unseen through one of the forward forecastle ports.

Bottle in hand, Jukes leaned in the doorway and looked out into the night. Tomorrow he would be forever done with the sea.

Shore lights glimmered, winking through the rain. The sound of music reached him, faint upon the wind. Singing came, indistinctly from the waterfront. It was very solitary, very cold, in the forecastle.

Jukes moved closer to the lamp, and held the bottle up. The crimp nudged the boarding master.

Alf Jukes put the bottle to his nose. Something to warm him a little; then toss it over the side.

Jukes tipped the bottle. His Adam's apple rose and fell. He took the bottle from his lips, and listened. He looked about him, making sure that he was all alone.

Jukes sat down, bottle in hand. Outside the wind wailed drearily. The cold rain hissed. His Adam's apple rose and fell again.

The boarding master entered the forecastle, the crimp at his heels. Jukes turned, and leaped to his feet. Lifting the bottle to hurl it he swayed uncertainly.

The crimp was laughing.

Jukes clutched at the bulkhead. The lamp was grown suddenly dim. The boarding master and the crimp had disappeared.

Some one struck Alf Jukes just behind the ear. Some one laughed near-by.

Stars whirled in a pitch black sky. The boarding master knelt over Jukes.

Everything was dark.

Continuing

TREASURE

A story of men, women and gold in the SOUTH SEAS

By Gordon Young

LIANFO was a copra port. The steamer came but once a month, when it came regularly, which was not usual; so, not hearing much of the outside world, the inhabitants chattered over and over of the small happenings in their midst.

Three men were lying on the beach, facing the dark water. One of these men was Old Bill Barnes, bearded and talkative as a parrot, as full of repetition. Another was Old Tom Wateman, thin, small, bandy-legged; a crabbed man with red-rimmed eyes. The other was a lazy young beachcomber by the name of Raeburn, Jack Raeburn. For a long time they had been shipmates on the *Dragon*, a black-hulled schooner; Will Heddon, master.

Heddon stood above six feet, was wide of shoulders and heavy of fists; he hated the islands, natives, climate, but loved the sea, and the wild tricky life of an island dodger.

He once had business dealings with a man named Walscher, one of the rich men of Lianfo. Of course Walscher got the best of him, which later led to Heddon's flattening him out. But he soon learned that on Lianfo a rich man's flesh could not be abused. Magistrate Davies—"Porpoise Davy," Heddon called him—was Walscher's good friend. Walscher, being a business man, cast an eye on Heddon's schooner. It was libeled—attached.

The three seamen were talking of this, and of T'eeay Layeen, the Chinese pirate. A remarkable fellow, people said; tall and dark eyed, with the look of royalty in his bearing; possessor of great treasure, too. But then, Heddon was said to know of an island of treasure, the existence of which he would neither affirm nor deny. People called him a deep 'un.

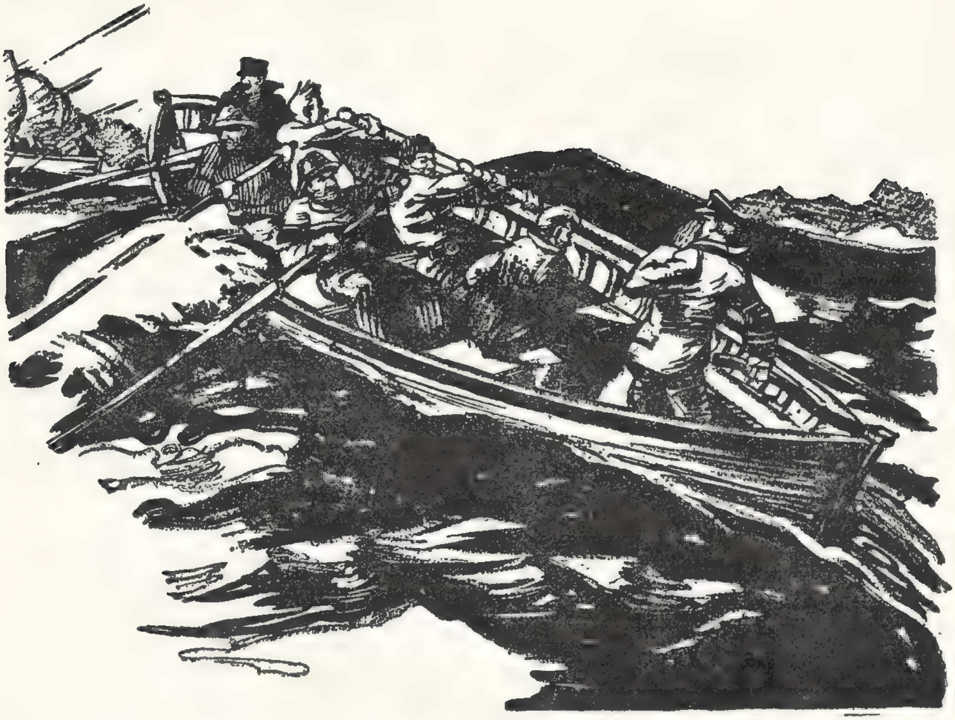
Denasso, the opium-smoking musician of a miserable troupe of show people who were stranded on Lianfo, came to Heddon with a message. Vioux, their manager—who was completely dominated by his snake-charmer, Madame, and Abdul, the Human Bull, a strong-man—was in trouble. He had brought a Chinese slave-girl, Po-Shu, to the island and now Porpoise Davy had her. Heddon asked where they had found her.

"Madame found her in Sydney," said Denasso, smilingly. "How or where I don't know. Really don't. It doesn't matter. Lovely child, Po-Shu, what?"

But Vioux would say: "My daughter, monsieurs, by my firs' wife. Ah, a marveelous woman, my firs' wife!"

There were Chinese who wanted her, too; so Vioux gave Heddon a great diamond he had stolen from Madame, as a price to kidnap Po-Shu and take them all to the mainland. Heddon pounded the thick bottom of an empty gin bottle on a piece of scrap iron, threw the glass into a chamois sack with the diamond, and persuaded Walscher to accept security for his lien on the *Dragon*, giving him the one diamond. Talk of Heddon's treasure was revived, and men of the beach planned to stow away on the *Dragon* when she sailed.

That night Magistrate Davies was dozing on his porch, when the kidnapers arrived. Heddon tried to talk him into giving up the girl; insults and reason, logic and jeers, meant nothing to Porpoise



Davy. When he was finally tied up, his timid wife, begging mercy for him, led them to Po-Shu's room.

A gust of wind through an open window set shadows dancing as the flame flickered.

"Po-Shu? Po-Shu?" Denasso called coaxingly. Heddon, holding the lamp high in one hand, turned to the bed and bent over it.

"She's gone!" he said. "Been gone—the bed's cold! Looks like the Chinks got her."

So they laid Mrs. Davies on the cot, tying her down with strips of torn sheeting. She understood their need of time in their getaway and was thankful that they had not hurt her husband.

"We'll leave him high and dry," promised Heddon. As they lurched through the darkness, Heddon shouted:

"We've some luck anyhow, Jack! There'll be wind enough for our hurry."

Once aboard the ship, after fighting through the rain and bluster of that storm-swept night, the men were turned to. Even Abdul was forced to the capstan, though Heddon had to knock him out first. After a tense half hour the schooner was put over the bar, in pursuit of the Chinese ship, thought to carry Po-Shu.

Vioux and Madame questioned Will Heddon about his knowledge of treasure. He told them:

"See here, if I knew of treasure would I bang and bat about in these islands, stealing shell an' doing a tramp's odd jobs, when with little more than the glint of gold one could live at ease in, say Paris? You're all fools over that treasure yarn. If there'd been a smell of treasure I'd have dug for it long ago."

Then a sudden uproar broke out on the deck above; the stowaways were out! A fierce fight took place for possession of the *Dragon*, ending with Heddon and his crew in charge of a wrecked schooner; topmast, foresail and jib in a jumble on deck. Pelew, ringleader of the beach gang, walked aft to Will Heddon and said:

"Nothin' left to fight for, mister, but a dismasted tub as won't sail."

"You'll all get to the pumps," said Heddon. "With the boats smashed we'll keep afloat as long as possible."

Madame's great snake, Baal-Phlegor, had the entire crew in terror. Heddon held his distance with the rest but ordered it kept alive for his own ends.

The following morning dawn came with a murky glow, filtering through the rain. Walscher's *Jack-Girl* was expected to show up and carry them back to Lianfo and prison, but the first thing sighted was a long-boat. Pelew, in the shrouds with binoculars, suddenly shouted:

"Look! By ——, they're Chinks! Looks like we had a new lot of pumpers comin' aboard!"

As they drew near, a tall finely built Chinese was seen in the stern—steering and sculling. The boat pulled alongside and Madame, at the rail, screamed:

"Po-Shu! In the boat there. You will see!"

Denasso was putting in a plea for the protection of the slave-girl from Vioux and Madame when his gaze was drawn shoreward. The *Jack-Girl* was bearing out from Lianfo.

"EH, WILL? Wot is—" Old Bill's aged eyes were not quite so good as he tried always proudly to make out, and in that blur of rain he could not see clearly.

"The *Jack-Girl*, Bill, with Walscher on her. Old Davy too, I'd say. Somebody must have reported us out here, and here they come. Aye, the luck some rascals have! Here they get us all, Chinks and girl too. Prison."

Something very like a shudder went through Heddon, and his hard face grew black with a staring frown as he seemed to peer at himself tramping across the prison yard in leg irons.

He dropped his hand on Bill's shoulder, turning the old fellow about, then eyed the ghostly bark for a moment before he said:

"You an' Tom there have followed the track o' the winds too long—prison cells'll be coffins to you. I'll say it now—may not have the chance later. They'll chain us apart most likely for fear we'll break away together. If the repentance of such a fool as I've been is any solace to you, you —— old Jeremiah, take it! But this is it; now listen close— You an' Tom turn witness against me, understand? They don't need witnesses, so what you say won't hurt me any, and'll help you lads get off. Jack here has youth enough to get him off, at least with something light. But you and Tom swing over to the Crown, an' tell your yarn against me. Understand?"

Old Bill glowered with increasing wrath, and as if at last struck by aged palsy, trembled. He clawed down at one side of his beard as if to tear it from his cheek. He opened his old nearly toothless mouth and made vague angry sounds, then spit a cheekful of tobacco juice on the deck to clear his mouth for speech. In nearly fifty years of sea-work, Bill Barnes had never before spit on the deck of his ship. His jaws quivered.

"Me! Me an' Tom! Turn agin ye, Will 'Eddon? Not to save yer worthless soul from 'ell, we wouldn't! Arsk that o' shipmytes! You ain't the man I allus thought, no'ow! I got too much faith in Godhamighty, Will 'Eddon, not to think as 'ow 'E damns neck-deep in 'ell the man as fails a friend! It's in the Bible so!"

"Don't be a blasted fool!"

"Fool? Aye, you're that! Repen'ant? Aye, me an' Tom 'r disapp'inted in ye, Will! It's awright f'r to be repen'ant, Will, at times—but, lad, don't never be repen'ant 'fore ye're licked!"

"Licked!" said Heddon, stung, half angered. "On a sinking ship with the crew against us? And the bark there, with armed men on her? We can sink but we can't fight! Shall we scuttle her an' go down? That what you want?"

"No, no. Course not. But—"

"Well," said Heddon, not loudly but in a way that made them know he meant it, "I would choose that before I'd land in leg irons for half a lifetime. But man's the suffering fool to think something good lies just ahead."

"An' it allus does, Will, allus," said Old Bill coaxingly. "As sartain as there's a God, lad, there's none in 'ell but cowards! None but them as 'as quit 'opin' an' fightin'. I seen faith move some orful big mountains, lad, for them as kep' on fightin'!"

"Queer old duck you are. But you, Jack—Jacques, I mean," for Heddon would jeer however bad his luck, "cut five years off your age when they question you. With your gift for lying, you ought to go scot-free. I mean it, boy. You wriggle out of this —— mess any way you can. Hear me?"

The worthless, lazy young Raeburn swore at him, with feeling, indignant. Whatever the boy might have said had Heddon first taken him aside and explained, Old Bill had shown the way to answer such a proposal, and so he answered.

"Then somehow we'll break jail an' steal a boat to get off the island," said Heddon, frowning thoughtfully in the way that often meant trouble for some one, usually for himself as much as anybody. "Not—I'm not going to prison, not for putting a fist in Walscher's eye an' a gag in Old Davy's mouth. No!"

Heddon turned away with the preoccupied frown still on his face and went to the schooner's side to see what was going on.

"Aye, lad—" Old Bill spoke with a grave air of satisfaction—"that's more the talk wot a man as knows 'im 'spects to 'ear from Will 'Eddon."

III

A SEA-LADDER had been slung over; the boat was hauled in alongside. If in its tossing the boat had touched the side of the schooner it would have been splintered; the Chinese fended with their oars, at times with outstretched arms. There was the risk too of capsizing the boat as men tried to leave it.

The steersman stood up—a voice or two spoke in surprize: "How tall the blighter is!" "For a Chink, ——! 'E's man-sized!" And, without noticeable effort balancing himself to the jerk and pitch of the boat, he spoke to his men, making them keep down, telling which to rise and when to make the jump.

One, then another, then the third made a scrambling reach for the sea-ladder, caught hold, climbed swayingly, was helped and pulled on deck. Po-Shu moved reluctantly, half standing, one hand on the gunwale, the other raised to reach.

"Wait a minute," Old Tom shouted, "I'll—"

He started to climb over and down the swinging ladder to give her a hand; but Pelew pushed him aside with a kind of gleefulness—

"Ladies like for me to help 'em!"

Pelew, with an ape-like agility, swung over, dropped down, and dangling there, reached below him, caught Po-Shu's arm, pulled, held her, helped her, hugged her tightly, then let her pass into other hands that reached down for her.

"Come on, ol' ——!" Pelew, with his hand thrust down to help, called the steersman a vile name, but meant it companionably.

The Chinese was not a big man at all, but tall and half naked, looked so thin that one must wonder from where he got the weight to bend a steering oar; for a moment he eyed Pelew with a motionless staring as if he judged between the insulting word and its friendly tone. Then he asked—

"You are the captain?"

Pelew, so he said afterward, nearly fell off the ladder at the way the fellow spoke; and answered, "Who the —— are you!" but did not wait for what the Chinese might say, for he heard a commotion on deck, high voices and a shriek.

Wherever there was sound of trouble, Pelew made eager haste to have a look, usually to take part. He turned, and with the scrambling rush of a monkey up a swaying bough, jumped inboard, shouting, "Here, what's up!" But no one answered him.

Po-Shu had reached the deck, passing in a way through many hands, all eager to help because she was a girl, an odd little girl, and they were men; and Denasso, getting near her, bent his head in a quick whisper so that the instant she was free of helping hands she darted, just as if guided by a sensitive instinct, to Heddon's side, not speaking, not clutching at him, not even looking up at him, but pressing close as when one takes shelter.

"Come wiz me, Po-Shu," Madame said with a curl at each corner of her mouth that was meant to be taken for a smile, and put out her hand. But Vioux, more impetuous, having much less sense than Madame, thoughtlessly made a vicious threat in French and snatched at her.

Po-Shu shrank; she did not cry out, she did not make a resisting move except to press backward. A lifetime of wicked wisdom could not have taught her to make a stronger appeal to Heddon than this attitude of utter weakness. He reached out, angered, caught Vioux, shook him, and with a push like a blow threw him away. Vioux screamed with the shrillness of a frightened woman, and landed sprawling, half-way across the deck.

Madame, fixing her coal-black eyes on Heddon, paused rigidly; then with rapid flutter of hands cried:

"Good, monsieur! Ze beast-brute, heem! To hurt thees child. Come, Po-Shu—you dear leetle sing! Come an' I weel give you ze warm dry dress—"

Po-Shu looked at her, but did not answer and turned a quick anxious upward glance at Heddon.

Heddon did not notice, was not looking at her but at the half-naked Chinese who was coming near. He stood a head taller than most Chinese; although a yellow-belly castaway, there was no humbleness in his bearing, and he did not move his bare feet with anything like a coolie's shuffling scrape, as did the other Chinese sailors who now stood together near the bulwarks, their shoulders hunched impassively to the rain, their necks drawn in like the sons of turtles that they were.

Heddon took a step forward, meeting him, and swung an arm in a backward gesture toward Po-Shu:

"Who the devil is this girl?" Then, thinking to make the question more plain, groped a bit in pidgin-English: "You savvy me talkee? This *nu-yen*. What for you stealum her—"

A loud voice, Pelew's, called:

"Hey, mister! He talks English—better'n me or you!"

The Chinese spoke slowly, and did not wholly tell the truth, for he said:

"I know not any more of her than men who lie have told to me. To me was given a ship and men if I would take her from a house. It was the ship, not this woman, that I wanted. The ship sank—"

His speech had a slight hesitancy, very like an accent; his choice of words was precise, but suggested that though he spoke in English he did not think in the language of white-skinned devils; that is, at his tongue's end he translated what he wished to say.

Chinese merchants—he was contemptuous of merchants—in Lianfo wanted the girl; she had much the market value of a jewel if taken to where men bought those living jewels; but they, mere money-changers, feared the magistrate's wrath. He, who had been a sailor, learned of their desire and fear. He offered, in exchange for the command of a ship, to take her by stealth and bear her and the merchant-thief to China. A white man who knew the harbor had been taken by force and put on the lugger, and warned with a knife's point to take the ship out safely. All went well until right in the teeth of the harbor's mouth; and though they drove her with all men at the pump, she filled, in the black hours before dawn, sank; and such as could took to boats.

That was his story, told in few words; and that he told it at all showed how unlike most Chinese, usually dully secretive at all times, he was.

Heddon laughed at him in so odd a way that the almond slant of his eyes became mere slits in a face that was as sea-stained and brown as old bronze; it was as if he were not used to the sound of laughter in his ears, and mistrusted it.

"There, see there!" said Heddon with a shout. "There comes the ship out after us, and we'll each wear an end of the same chain! I did much the same as you, for the same unlucky reason. Wanted a ship. Broke into the house, into her room—but she was gone. You'd got her! I did it for a ship too. This one. You've lost yours. Mine's wrecked aloft and alow. I hailed you in the harbor last night—got shot at! We'd been all right an' fifty miles away by now, but a fool crew here thinks I know of treasure and made a fight to make me lay a course for a cave stuffed full of treasure chests."

The Chinese half raised a hand, and Heddon then noticed how very small and slim his hands were, like a woman's though they had a big man's strength. He was looking toward the bark flying down out of the morning's mist upon them; and seemed about to say something, but the Chinese sailors called out in jabbering excitement as they pointed over the side. There was a trampling rush to the rail.

Below in the boat were two men. No sooner had the last Chinese come up than they had slid down, and one had oars out, fending off, while the other kneeled, feverishly trying to loosen the knot with which the Chinese had made the line fast. Just what they meant to gain by making off no one knew, perhaps not even themselves. Fear gives cowards queer ideas of what it is best to do, and they may have whispered together of how it would help them to escape punishment if they got off, were first picked up by the bark and so first might tell what lies they pleased.

Haste at the knot made the man's fingers fumble. Pelew, with violent oaths, yelled at him; and a fellow lifted his face, in staring. Men from the deck laid hold on the line to haul the boat close in. Pelew, who could fly into an instant's rage at almost any time, with sure ape-like scrambling went over the rail, down on the dangling sea-ladder. The man with the oars raised an oar to strike, thinking Pelew meant to jump, but Pelew drew his long sheath knife, leaned down, shouting:

"You want to go! Now go an' drown, y' blasted——!" From the deck men called at him to stop it, but he sawed the line in two.

The boat swept free on the rise of a swell that with a bucking heave tossed up the schooner; the man with the oars struck hastily at the water, and the boat was tossed out from under the lee of the *Dragon*, being pitched about like a chip, and like a chip was spilled into the trough of a sea and smothered under. The boat was gone.

A man adrift in a rough sea is a mere speck, now under, now rising with a futile splash of arm, now out of sight in the trough, now buried in the foam, and soon gone, unless a powerful swimmer.

The boat, swirling away from the schooner's side, capsized beyond the reach of any line that could be thrown; though Old Bill threw a buoy. He might as well have thrown a feather. If either of the fellows saw it flash in air, falling, he could not beat up to where it drifted. And so they drowned.

Men looked away toward where they last had been seen. For a moment or two no one said a word, but eyes turned toward Pelew who still stared out to sea as if searching; and they wondered how he felt now. Was it murder he had done? They had wanted to go—he had cut the line.

Pelew with preoccupied fumbling stabbed home the knife into the sheath on his hip.

The tall Chinaman looked carefully at Pelew, then said to Heddon—

"Who this man?"

"One that hid aboard to seize this ship and make me lay a course for treasure island!" Heddon looked toward Pelew—"The piracy of it couldn't have touched you—but what of murder?"

"Huh," said Pelew, glaring without alarm, without anger, at Heddon. "I'll be awright, mister."

"Be hung!" said some one of the sailors, not loudly but with satisfaction.

Pelew swung about. There was no telling who had spoken.

"I won't be hung—by no —— man I won't! You fellers are in this deep as me. An' blasted swabs, said you'd stick through ——. Bah! If we'd found treaser, you'd ha' got none of it—none o' you! I'd ha' seen to that!"

IV

AT THAT moment Denasso took Raeburn's arm, pulled him unwillingly aside, bent close to his ear and whispered:

"That Chink—Po-Shu just told me!—*T'eeay Layeen!*"

"What!" Raeburn faced about, staring.

"Shh!" Denasso told him. "Promise—shh-sh!" and touched his lips with a long forefinger, signifying secrecy.

"Why the—?" Raeburn patted his own lips questioningly.

"You and I—no one else knows but Po-Shu and the Chinks! You and I are friends. We'll get favor from the magistrate over there—" he gestured toward the bark—"by telling him. See? We'll tell him. I'm into this as deep as you. By telling who the Chinaman is, you and I, we'll get favor—"

Raeburn turned again and stared as though he had never before seen a Chinese.

T'eeay Layeen was looking about the deck, at this man and that, glancing at every one with quick appraisal.

Abdul was still aloof, still sourly bewildered. Vioux was spitting blood from a cut lip, and anxiously dabbing at his lip as if his blood were precious, and with each drop spilled that much of life were gone. Madame had gone to Po-Shu and put an arm about her, whispering; but though Po-Shu did not try to draw away she would not go as Madame wished.

T'eeay Layeen's eyes glanced without an instant's pause over the women. He looked at men, and looked hardly longer at young Raeburn and the opium-eater, Denasso, than at the useless women. Old Tom and Old Bill, not liking to be stared at by a Chinese, stared back as if a little insulted. Heddon he seemed to measure carefully, and having looked quickly at the men about Pelew, said to Pelew—

"You want treasure?"

"Aw, don't be funny!" Pelew shouted.

As if Pelew had not answered, he repeated—

"You want treasure?"

"Yeah, —— you! Don't ever'body? I want lots o' things. I want that blasted bark to go to ——, too!"

"I," said T'eeay Layeen, "know treasure. Where it is."

"Aw, shut up!"

"For what we've done, you, me, all here, must go to prison, and some will have their heads broke off by a rope, as is the English way!" He spoke slowly, choosing the words as if to make them forceful. "We here—many men! We take that ship—" this to Heddon—"we sail away. You help me do that—" this to Pelew—"I show you treasure. You do that?"

Raeburn started to get to Heddon's side; but Denasso sensed what he was about, caught hold of him, held on:

"No, you promised not to tell. You've not the right—after I did it for you—to help you—"

Heddon frowned at the Chinese, really frowning thoughtfully at his proposal, and then turned eyes toward the bark. Walscher's barque. Had it been anybody's else bark there would not have been so much of a scowl on Heddon's face. It was one thing to be overhauled and carried off;

it was something more to be overhauled by Walscher.

Pelew said loudly, scornfully:

"Take 'er, how? With these swabs here? They wouldn't fight a crippled cat! An' what o' treaser? What d'you know of treaser, heh?"

"By the grave of my father, his father, and their fathers, I promise to you treasure if you—" with a sweeping glance and a slight gesture he took in all on the deck about him—"fight and take that ship!"

It was about as forceful an oath as a Chinese could take, but excepting Heddon, none thought much of it as an oath, and Heddon thought more of the Chinese's daring proposal than of the sacred invocation.

Most of the men about the deck felt the word "treasure" had a sound of mockery. They had long before talked themselves into the conclusion that, after all, they had been fools to think Heddon knew as much as they had thought about treasure. If so, would he have burdened himself with Vioux's freaks as passengers? They could think so much more clearly in the gray wet dawn than they had been able to think with their elbows on Grogan's bar, or in the forecastle, spilling gin down their throats and spending wealth not yet gained.

Old Tom and Old Bill, with much the faithfulness of two old dogs—and old sea-dogs they were—moved over closer to Heddon, whose lucky recklessness had often thrilled them, and they looked from him to the bark and back again. They knew much about Will Heddon, knew there were some things he would do, some he wouldn't; could name many he would balk at, but not always guess just what would make him balk, what wouldn't.

He seemed to sense their silent questioning, and as if in answer, said:

"If we had a chance, I'd try it. But where's the chance?"

Pelew shouted out what the men were muttering among themselves:

"Take 'er? How? What with? We're lucky to be took off! It's piracy to try it. Try it an' get licked—we would get hung. Me, I'm willin' for one to do it. But how? They won't let us get on board with arms, an' they'll be armed."

T'eeay Layeen said—

"But if you do not try you will go to prison."

"Somepin in that," said Pelew, less loudly than usual. "Will you fellers fight?"

The men protested. They were wet, hungry, licked, and the glamor of treasure had been lost; also whatever liking they may have had for Pelew. Some one mentioned "piracy" and he caught up the word, yelling at them:

"Piracy! You're up for it now! This here ship—you've wrecked 'er, tryin' to seize 'er. What more you do won't make it worse! An' me, I'll be Crown witness 'gainst you. You see 'f I don't!"

"I'll not risk it!" one answered.

"Nor me!" said another.

"B'lieve a Chink!" said some one.

"Aw, how to do it? Tell me that!" inquired one fellow, not with the hope of learning how, but to make it clear there was no hope of carrying through so wild a plan.

Pelew cursed them; then, with sudden savagery:

"If you won't fight, pump ship! I told ye long ago, an' here yer loafin'! She's heavy now an' rollin' deep! To the pumps—"

He hit the nearest man, struck at another, whipped out his knife and with upraised hand drove them to the pump; swore he would turn Crown witness and have them hanged; said:

"We're sinkin' an' I hope she goes down before you're taken off! You leave 'er last, so pump —— you!"

V

HEDDON was studying the bark through the glass. He lowered the glass and looked behind him at the Chinese and started to say something; then, as if he hardly believed himself what he was about to say, again raised the glass and frowned through it with a kind of puzzlement.

"Try it, Tom," he said, handing over the glass. "I can't believe what I see. Or rather what I don't see! I make out Walscher, but the Porpoise is not by him. And there's no more than her crew on the deck. She didn't come out after us!"

"What's that you say, mister?" asked Pelew.

"They didn't come out after us. But coming out, they've found us. Some men have luck, and the Fates seem a fool over Walscher!"

"You mean— Then by ——, we'll capture her!" And Pelew, with that brazen rascality that made one almost, but never more than almost, like him, went on, "She's a prize herself, an' there's ports to sell 'er in! Besides, this Chink—he's promised treasure! An' he'd better know where it lies hid. We thought we'd make you, mister, dig it up. An' now you'll be in with us to make him show the way!"

Old Tom lowered the glass—

"There's naught but her crew."

"Then she'll be easy!" Pelew reached for the glass, "Give me a look!"

"An' Walscher 'e carries niggers mostly," said Old Bill.

"White officers and a good skipper." Heddon spoke absently, thinking deeply of something else.

"'As to. 'E's allus drunk."

"Mister, do we try it!" Pelew shouted at Heddon, though Heddon was within arm's reach.

"It'll be a fight," said Heddon moodily. "There's five or six white men, as many blacks and —"

"But look at us here! Me, you, these gran'dads an'—"

"Hold yer tongue!" said Old Tom waspishly, not liking to be called a granddad, and Bill pulled at his beard as if to pull it off and show that his face was not so old.

"— that Chink, the kid Raeburn," Pelew went on, "an'—"

"They'll have arms. We won't," said Heddon. "But that's not—"

"But we'll s'prize 'em an' have half of 'em dead before—"

"And that's just what I mean!" said Heddon, turning on him, glowering. "There's to be no murder!"

"What, in a fair fight! ——! An' you've got a name for fightin'. How the ——'d you ever get it?"

"I don't kill men—not even turning pirate, I don't kill men that have the right to fight for what I'm stealing!"

"It's hangin' anyhow, an' what the ——'s a dead man!"

"Murder, when it goes with robbery! And their taking us off—" said Heddon—"that's like a rescue. Any ship but Walscher's—I don't think I'd even try it. But there's to be no killing. You hear me?"

"I hear ye awright," said Pelew. "But ——! Whoever heard of such a thing! You hear that, Mr. Chink? This big devil here says we'll make the fight, but mustn't hurt nobody. Bah! How you goin' do it?"

Heddon glanced aside. Madame had left Po-Shu and stood near the sour Abdul, and both of them looked moodily at the bark.

"She'll want that snake, I know she'll want it to go with her. Don't let her know, but if she can get it on board over there—I'll see that the thing's dumped out on deck. Then we'll have the ship. All hands will run to cover!"

"No ye don't, ye don't—don't do that!" said Pelew. "I ain't afraid o' no —— man, but snakes! My maw did an' her maw—it's in our fam'ly. Kid throwed a rubber snake at me onct. When I got through shakin' I killed 'im—or tried to. An' how'd you ever catch it again? We'd be bad off as them with that snake loose!"

"Catch it? That's for her to do."

"You mean, *you* ain't scared o' that snake?" Pelew demanded with his loud voice hushed to almost a whisper.

"By the way I feel," said Heddon, "I know how scared other men will be. That's our best chance. When we've got the ship, we can shoot the snake. But don't let her know. She'd let us all hang rather than have that *babee* hurt."

"Mister," said Pelew, glaring at Heddon but not speaking angrily, "don't do it. I never yet backed out o' anything if there was another good man willin' to take the chanct with me. But I don't fight no snakes. Not sober I don't. What'd you say, Mr. Chink?"

T'eeay Layeen, lord of the sea, looked down upon the squat Pelew and said nothing; he glanced penetratively at Heddon and said nothing. He knew that foreign devils were madmen, but he had never known of such madness as this. Among his own crews life was the cheapest thing they had. T'eeay Layeen himself was merciless as the edge of steel; less cruel than most yellow pirates, but more deadly. He simply did not understand what one white devil meant by saying he feared a snake; but far less what the other meant by saying that men on an attacked ship must not be killed.

CHAPTER VI

THE FATE OF THE JACK-GIRL

THE *Jack-Girl* with yards backed lay off to windward within distance of a trumpet's hail, and Walscher bellowed:

"—— me! but I'm glad to see you, you ——! Want to be took off, heh? Then get your boats in the water an' come. Hurry up! I can't stand by all day!"

"Then on your way!" Heddon shouted from between his hands, knowing very well that Walscher would have missed his chance of Heaven rather than miss putting back into Lianfo with the *Dragon's* crew.

"More such talk," Walscher bawled wrathfully, "an' I'll let you sink!"

"Sink? We'll be jury-rigged an' pumped dry in half a day!"

Walscher knew that wasn't so, but he hardly knew what to make of a man that would say it.

"You that want to be took off—" he was shouting at the other men, not at Heddon—"get in your boats!"

"Ain't got no boats!" two or three yelled at once. Pelew, loudest of all, shouted, "Boats smashed! We got women! Take us off!"

From the *Jack-Girl* they looked the *Dragon's* boats over carefully with glasses and came to the conclusion that if these people were to be taken off, the bark would have to do it in her own boats. So the whale boat was lowered away and came under the schooner's lee with four kanakas at the oars and an officer at the helm. The water was rough, but they were seamen. The officer was a young fellow, brusk, business-like, and did not like this business.

"Women an' children first," said Heddon, holding Raeburn's shoulder as he shoved him forward. Raeburn turned in protest. But Heddon told him, "Shut up, Jack. This is planned. And in a minute I'll give you the word of what you're to do over there when the fight starts. I want to see if she can make him let her take that snake."

Po-Shu, as if in a way symbolizing that her life was nothing but being passed from one man's hand to another, had again been handed down and with the sad patience of a woman trained to obey men, sat humbly where told in the whale boat.

Madame was refusing to leave the deck until her green box had been lowered. Abdul and Old Tom had brought it up and put it down at the bulwark.

"We take no baggage!" said the young officer.

"Zen don't!" said Madame, who knew how to handle men, at least young men. "I stay! I seenk! I drown! I do not care! What good is life wizout what makes life good? You brute-man! I seenk!"

She turned away indignantly.

"What's in the box?" asked the young officer; but his tone implied that he would not take it, no matter what it held.

"All my sings!" she said, not daring to say "snake."

"Can't take baggage! You fellows," he called, "put that fool woman over the side here!"

"We can't go until the woman does," said Heddon.

"Since when did you turn so blank-blasted gallant!" the young officer cried.

"An' I do not go wizout my sings!" said Madame.

No one made protest from the deck against boat space being used to carry the snake, for they had been told to keep their mouths shut. Even Pelew had threatened them. He liked to threaten. But he had said to Heddon:

"If she wants to do it, let 'er if she can. But you'll see, mister, there'll be no need for what you plan, so don't you try it—'less we're licked, which'll mean I'm dead; then I won't care."

"Well," the young officer called impatiently, "nobody else wants off?"

"Ah, monsieur, I will go now with you," said Vioux, but many hands reached out, some caught him, jerked and hustled him back.

"He'd try to buy himself off by telling, first thing, that we mean to seize the ship," said Raeburn.

"No more comin'? We'll shove off!" said the officer.

"Shove an' be —— to ye!" said Old Tom.

"Wimen go first!"

"Then make her come!"

"I am weeling, monsieur, if you permeet."

"Oh ——, then lower away that —— box!" he called.

Some of the men fell to and lashed the box with ropes. There were small air-holes at either end; a small window of wire grating in the lid, and a wooden shutter that slipped over this. Madame closed the shutter before the box was lowered away.

"Plees, monsieur, careful!"

The young officer—his name was Blake—was swearing at the sight of the box, at its size and weight; and in the boat they were put to some trouble to stow it.

Mr. Blake reached up his hand to Madame. She was still enveloped in the man's oilskin. It was thrown over her head and about her like a cloak. She was pleasant to him, thanked him "so ver' much!", smiled brilliantly.

"How many more?" Heddon asked.

"Could've taken four but for this —— box. Only two now. She's pretty rough!"

"Call that rough!" said Old Tom scornfully.

"That's a c'am sea, m' boy!" said Old Bill.

Young Mr. Blake lost a part of his temper and said nasty things to both the old shellbacks who looked down upon him with interested expressions. It was oddly unlike a rescue at sea.

Denasso was the next to go. He had run down into the pantry and brought the box containing his opium layout. As this was held easily under his arm, Mr. Blake frowned at it but made no objections.

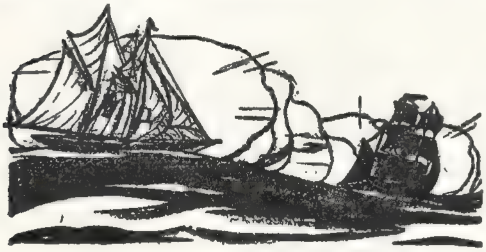
"You next, Jack. And listen," Heddon said quickly in a low tone. "Keep near that snake box when you get on board—unlock the lid. Stand by to dump that thing out on deck the minute the fight starts. Understand?"

The thrust forward that Heddon gave him shook the boy's head so that he nodded, but not willingly. He wanted to stand and protest, argue about it; remembered too that here was a chance to tell Heddon who that Chink was; but Heddon pushed him away.

Raeburn jumped down into the boat, and the impulsive Mr. Blake swore at him.

They shoved off.

"Ah," said Madame to Mr. Blake, "you are so ver' young man to be so mooch ze hero an' save us all! Marveelous!"



II

THE *Jack-Girl* had stumbled on the schooner by sheer luck.

The night before Walscher and some of his friends had been playing poker on board the bark. One of these friends was a man to whom he hoped to sell an unprofitable coconut plantation at Kuplico, an island two hundred miles to the south; and, if the weather moderated, he intended to sail at dawn. He had supplies on board for the Kuplico men, but most of all he hoped that he had a man who would buy the plantation.

The magistrate some time after midnight had worked himself out of his lashings, or else Mrs. Davies had taken pity on her husband and released him. Getting out some servants and a cart—he was too fat to walk, too heavy for the back of an island pony—he had gone blundering about in the rain and darkness, indignantly awakening people to tell of the outrage.

Word had been brought out to the bark, where the poker game was broken up in talk of Heddon; and the guess was that he would never be seen again anywhere near Lianfo. The schooner had fled in the darkness, and in what direction no one knew.

Walscher had gone to bed too drunk to remember to give orders to his captain not to sail if the weather was rough; and as his captain, a man named Scott, had been a South Sea trader and rather liked dirty weather, particularly with Walscher on board, since it made him seasick and kept him out of sight, Captain Scott had gone out of the harbor as soon as it was light enough to see the way. A lookout sighted the *Dragon*. Walscher was shaken into life and told that a wreck lay ahead. He and his companion, the one to whom he hoped to sell the plantation, strengthened their stomachs with brandy and came on deck.

Walscher greeted his returning boat with the shout of—

"Where's that —— Heddon?"

"These were all we could bring this trip, sir," Mr. Blake called up.

Beside Walscher's was a brown hard face, that of Captain Scott. The face of another man near by was puffed, blousy, fatuous; he was the planter going to look at Walscher's coconut land.

"Better send away another boat if we're to get all those fellows off before noon," said Captain Scott. "That is, unless you don't want to leave us short-handed."

Captain Scott had no other thought in mind than squally weather; but Walscher, who had never been complimented for his bravery by other than bottle companions, and by them only when half drunk, shouted.

"Short-handed be —— to you!" and slapped his side where a big revolver was in a holster. "There'll be no fight in these beachcombers! By ——! I'd like the excuse to shoot 'em. It won't take much excuse. I tell you that—an' them, too "

Scott too had a gun in his pocket; these days he carried it more as the result of habit than as a precaution. He looked pointedly at Walscher and at his flabby friend who too had a big revolver strapped about his belly: the very way their guns were slung showed that neither had ever been into enough dangers to learn to carry a revolver properly. Besides, both were even now a little drunk.

Raeburn came up over the side after Madame and Po-Shu, and the first thing he noticed was the flap holsters belted on outside of the oilskins. Bare hands against guns—with that snake loose. The boy was chilled, weary, exhausted by excitement and sleeplessness; from being teased, he had thrown away his tasseled bandage and his hair lay like a drowned man's and his head hurt; his stomach was empty. The thought of overturning the snake box and spilling that great length of serpent out on the deck, right at his own feet, made his back prickly with goose-flesh.

"So you are the treasure-girl, eh?" said Walscher, taking Po-Shu's chin in his palm and bending down the better to look at her. She shrank slightly, but did not lower her eyes. "You poor little pigeon, all wet! We'll fix that. Woo Lung! Somebody get that —— steward!"

Walscher, stooping over, swayed a little; the deck was not steady, neither were his feet, and he looked at her with searching appraisal. Bedraggled as Po-Shu was, she still was like a toy-girl, soft and quaint.

Denasso, even as the Chinese steward came into view from the after deck-house, slipped on the wet deck and in falling dropped his box which he snatched at anxiously.

'Here—what you got there!" Walscher shouted. "Scott, see what that fellow's carrying. Maybe arms!"

Captain Scott, not at all afraid that the box might contain arms, nevertheless jerked the box roughly from Denasso and roughly shoved the poor fellow aside as he reached out for it with a gesture very much as if pleading for his life.

Scott opened the box, laughed shortly in disgust, and held out the open box for Walscher to see. Walscher looked into the box, looked at Denasso, said, "You —— hophead!" then seizing the box, with a bluster of motion, flung it overboard.

Denasso looked stupidly at Walscher, not in anger so much as seemingly amazed that a man could be so cruel; then he turned and stared at the water. He seemed to be searching for where the box had sunk. Those near by eyed him curiously for a moment or two, but not longer. The expression of pain on his thin face appeared to amuse them. He put both hands to his face and began to shiver. Without opium he could not live.

"Now what's in that box?" Walscher shouted as a rope fell from a block on a yard's end to heave up the green box out of the boat. "More opium, I bet!"—this sarcastically. "Well, there ought to be enough there to turn a pretty penny, heh? Fine salvage, boys!"

This being meant for wit, some of Walscher's men laughed, but not Captain Scott, who gave Walscher a long glance as if estimating how many glasses of brandy he had already taken.

"Monsieur," said Madame with a humble sweetness, "ze box eet is mine. Eet hold all zat I haf in zis worl'. Surely so beeg, brave man do not throw my leetle box over-z-board, eh? No? I sank you oh so ver' much!"

Cleverly she had thanked him before he gave the least sign of not having the box dumped over the boat's side; but having felt the soft stroke on his vanity, he called:

"What's the matter with you fellows there? Shake yourselves! Get that box on board, an' get back over there. Can't you see they're pumping on that wreck, —— 'em! I don't want 'em to drown. I'd rather take 'em in an' have 'em hung! Ha! Ha! Ha!" This also being a joke some of the sailors laughed. "An' Scott, why don't you send away another boat, as I told you?"

Captain Scott lifted his eyebrows and pointed at the box:

"What's the matter with you—or didn't you see the show? There's a snake in that box an'—

"Snake!" said Walscher explosively.

"Ah, monsieur! Not only heem, but my jewels—all zat I haf! I put zem in ze box for heem to watch. My jewels, monsieur!"

"Well," said Walscher, with no enthusiasm, "it's come this far—get it on board. Jewels, you say?"

"Yes, monsieur," Madame answered, lying easily. "All zem! All zat I haf. He guards zem for me."

"Never heard of such a thing!" said the fatuous-faced fellow who was interested in Kuplico coconuts.

Walscher's Chinese steward was a cheery, withered old fellow who, for some reason not known to white devils, was very much respected by such of his countrymen as knew him. While the others about the deck were interested in Madame's box, he, having seen Po-Shu, went quickly near her. They spoke together rapidly and softly; then with a furtive quickness, Po-Shu looked about her. She was for the moment unnoticed, and taking two short backward steps, reached Denasso.

Her voice was low, clear, with a kind of fluttering eagerness:

"Oh, my fliend, it awlite. I ask this mos' honalble nice man. He smokum pipe a little. Say you my fliend, you poo' boy, you smokum his pipe quiet time."

Then she took two quick little steps forward and again stood pathetically expressionless.

II

THE box was lowered away on deck, dragged well inboard to be out of the way. Men gave it lingering glances as they passed by at work.

Young Raeburn, looking and feeling as woebegone as a wet cat, stood by it, hoping to be unnoticed, at least unsuspected; though even deeper was the hope that he would be dragged off and thrown into irons. If Heddon had told him to jump overboard, he would probably have jumped. Now with furtive glances he cast about for the best place to make for when that snake was turned loose; and decided to make for a room in the after deck-house and slam shut the door.

Denasso, also being now unnoticed, moved near to Raeburn as if lonely, but they did not talk.

Madame was left standing there in the rain, just as if she were not a woman, while Walscher and the fat-faced copra planter, followed by Woo Lung, had taken Po-Shu into the cabin to be given hot tea and wrapped in warm blankets. She was like an odd little piece of flexible porcelain, and the novelty of her amused the half drunken Walscher, who was a lump of bad clay that had somehow got himself fashioned into the fine figure of a tall broad man.

Madame, thus ignored, stood straight and held her head up; and kept her head covered too with that oilskin, though it was pushed back so that the rain washed her cheeks, feverish with the anger of being insultingly neglected—for a Chink girl.

Blake had returned toward the *Dragon*, and a second boat had been sent away.

Captain Scott, noticing Madame, walked by her without a glance or a word, entered one of the deck-house staterooms and came out almost at once with a glass nearly full of whisky. He came up to Madame, and in a sort of grim, awkward way offered it to her.

"Ah sank you, monsieur," she said quickly, and smiled as best she could. "But no! No, sank you!"

"Well, set down—" he looked about—"set down there on your box."

"Sank you, monsieur, but I stand!"

She, offended, was stubbornly declining any courtesies; and Scott had not tried to be gallant but in a way to make an apology of sorts for Walscher, whose booming laugh could be heard.

"All right then," said Scott, and drew back his arm as if to fling the liquor overboard, but catching the look on Raeburn's face, asked, "Oh, you want it, do you?"

Raeburn groaned hopefully, and Scott, grinning a little on hardly more than one side of his face, gave him the glass.

Raeburn measured off half the liquor at a guess, set his thumb as a mark, and drank. It was good hot liquor, smooth as oil, warm like fire, and went into a stomach empty as an upturned kettle. When the whisky had sunk to a level with his thumb—or a little below—he offered the glass to Denasso.

"No, you drink it," he said.

"Go on," Raeburn told him. "This is good!"

Denasso drank a little and gave back the glass. Raeburn in two gulps emptied the glass; and in a very few minutes his tongue was dancing between clenched teeth, for he did have sense enough to keep his mouth shut. The very marrow in his bones felt warm; his heart beat a brave tattoo. He kicked the snake box with a bare toe, saying:

"Bah! You're nothing but a big overgrown fish worm!"

III

MR. BLAKE'S boat had returned to the *Dragon*, taken on six men, and shoved off before the second boat sent away by the *Jack-Girl* had reached the wreck.

Mr. Blake, at the tiller, rather admired the willingness with which Heddon, Old Tom and Old Bill, and Pelew each put his hands to an oar alongside of the boat's crew and pulled. Abdul, sullen and cramped, was cross-legged down on the floor boards to give the boat a better trim; and T'eeay Layeen, with his left arm in a sling as if it were broken, held the bailer.

The second boat, in charge of a man named Sandys, did not reach the *Dragon* until Mr. Blake was some distance off; and the first man to tumble down into Sandys' boat was little Vioux and the first thing he said was that those men—pointing—meant to seize the bark the instant they got on deck. Vioux had lost no time in trying to get himself into favor with what he thought would be the winning side.

"You mus' beat their boat—queek! Pull! Go! Queek!" he shouted at Sandys. "Ask them too—" he gesticulated toward the men still on the *Dragon* waiting to be taken off—"they tell you I speek truth!"

They readily said that it was so. Sandys, who had been doubtful, was now convinced. He yelled as loudly as he could toward Mr. Blake, but Mr. Blake could not hear, so Sandys shoved off with only Vioux for a passenger and told his men to row for their lives.

From the *Jack-Girl's* deck it could be seen that Sandys was acting like a madman.

"What's the matter with him!" Walscher asked.

"Acts drunk," said Scott, dryly, glancing at Walscher who also acted a bit drunker than usual.

"Always something of a fool, —— fool!" said Walscher.

"Always been a good sailor," said Scott. "Or I wouldn't have kept him." Then calling down to Mr. Blake when he had come alongside: "What's wrong with Sandys?"

"Can't 'magine!" said Blake, staring for a moment.

"Here's that —— Heddon!" said Walscher to his friend. "I'll make him remember the time he hit me. Hit me when I wasn't looking! On the beach—just walked up and hit me."

"How brutal!" said the man who was going to look at coconut land. "The blighter."

The boat was tossing under the sea ladder.

"You up first, there you Heddon!" Walscher yelled. "I want to get my hands on you!" As he spoke he fumbled with the flap of his holster, opening it to put his hand on the butt.

Mr. Blake told Heddon to go first, but Heddon told Abdul to go; and Abdul might not have moved but Old Tom told him the same thing. Abdul in moving swayed the boat so that the crew had to watch sharp; there was no pushing him down. He went; and somebody started a laugh by saying that he looked like an elephant trying to climb a rope.

"You there, Heddon, —— you! Come on deck next—" said Walscher.

But the Chinese, ignoring shouts at him, arose, stood steadily in the rocking boat, and made a one-handed jump for the ladder and hung there until reaching arms helped him over.

"Hanging back as long as you can, eh?" said Walscher, a little pleased that Heddon seemed to show fear. "Now you come—"

But Old Bill and Tom were already jumping from the boat; both old men, the one small and thin as a spider, the other patriarchal—they hung together, one above the other on the dangling ladder, scrambling rapidly.

"Go, Pelew!" said Heddon, and Pelew jumped.

Sandys was yelling hoarsely; they could hear his voice, not what he was saying. Men paused, looking toward him wonderingly instead of paying close attention to what was going on about them.

The instant Pelew's feet hit the deck, Captain Scott, with the briskness of an officer who had done that sort of thing before, many times, caught him by the shoulder, turned him half around, with a quick sure reach jerked away the sheath knife and tossed it into the sea, saying,

"You don't need that on this ship!"

Pelew faced about with so much of a glare in his bold eyes that Scott put his hand to his hip, significantly. Pelew cursed him.

"Shut up, or—"

"Shoot an' be ——!" Pelew yelled. He was very like a madman when angered.

"As you wish!" said Captain Scott coolly and drew his gun, leveling it. Pelew crouched, with fists doubled, glaring. "You're a crazy man," said Scott, quite calmly. "Now stand—"

Walscher was leaning over the rail and bellowing, and at that moment there were alarmed cries from the water below.

Sandys had got nearer, and in looking away toward him, trying to understand what he was yelling about, Mr. Blake and his men had let their boat hang off, about as far as the boat-hooks would reach, from the side of the *Jack-Girl*. Heddon, who guessed very well what Sandys was yelling about, had no time to lose, and so stood up to jump. Men yelled at him, some reached out frantically to pull him down; but he jumped from the gunwale, and the gunwale dipped, filling the boat half full of water as Heddon, with one hand up-flung, barely caught the last step of the sea-ladder.

The men in the boat instantly went overboard to take their weight out of it; and as Heddon climbed up, lines were flung down to the men in the water by a sailor or two who already stood at the side looking over.

The moment Heddon rose breast high above the *Jack-Girl's* rail Walscher hit him in the face; and as Heddon swayed back from force of the blow and roll of the bark, Walscher swayed forward; and hanging there, feet on the ladder, one hand holding the rail, Heddon swung up and over with drive of fist that knocked Walscher staggering back, and as he went, turning half around and slipping to his knees, he clawed gropingly at the flap holster.

The fight was on; it had started an instant before; Pelew had started it; and the moment Heddon jumped the rail he pitched himself with headlong leap, not at Walscher but at Pelew.

Captain Scott, with gun leveled at Pelew's head, had said quite calmly, "You're a crazy man. Now stand—" Then he took a quick backward step, but with the gun still on Pelew, he had glanced quickly over the side and down to see what the men in the water were yelling about; and the instant his eyes turned, Pelew jumped.

Pelew was as quick as he was bold, and with left hand or right, from any angle, he seemed able to put what weight he had behind the blow.

Captain Scott, going down as he pulled at the trigger, shot twice, wildly; and as he fell, with Pelew on top of him, snatching at the gun, Scott threw up his hand, trying to toss the gun overboard. It struck the bulwark, dropped into the scupper. With an ape-like bound Pelew went for it, got it, and turning bent down to shoot point-blank.

Pelew, his face set in a gasp of furious amazement, toppled over with Heddon's hand on his hand, wrenching at the gun; with Heddon's weight on top of him; with Heddon cursing him; and the hardest fight that was fought that day on the deck was between the two men who were leading the attack to seize the bark.

IV

BUT that was not the only struggle on the *Jack-Girl's* deck between those who had come off the wreck.

As the shooting began, Raeburn, full of drunken recklessness, started to fumble at the latch-lock of the snake box. But the catch was not a simple one. He called loudly upon Denasso to help, and this attracted Madame's attention to what he was about.

She ran at him, screamed, snatching at his hands, clawing and striking him.

"*Nom de Dieu!* What you do? Not zis. I beg— Oh! Oh! Not zis! Oh, you fool! You —— fool! He keel you! I beg—"

But instead of begging she swore at him in English and in French. She was furious and seemed frightened. The oilskin slipped away from her body and lay on the deck like a dead thing. She scratched and struck and cried for help, though she was getting far the best of the fight. Her black hair was shaken from its neat coils and flew about her; and, in the struggling, wet wisps of it were entangled in Raeburn's fingers. Too late, Madame clapped her hands to her head. The wig came away. She was bald.

All about there were yells, groans, curses; the sound of blows; guns were being fired; men leaped this way and that with hurtling rush; but Raeburn sagged back a step or two, and with arm outstretched uncertainly eyed the hairy thing as it dangled from his fingers—then he looked at Madame and laughed.

She stood for an instant transfixed in horror, as if stripped to nakedness; to her this was more than nakedness, for she was jealously fastidious of her appearance, and this had in it the shame of an exposed deformity.

Suddenly she snatched the wig from Raeburn's fingers, and with hands clapped to her head, she ran blindly off the deck, trying to hide herself, and entered the first room she reached of the after deck-house. A moment later the door closed behind her.

Raeburn stood stupidly gaping toward where she had gone; and the next instant he was bumped against and knocked over by a big fellow who ran from Old Tom. The fellow was Walscher's friend, the planter.

"Kill 'im, Jack! Kill 'im! He killed Ol' Bill—Ol' Bill!"

The big fellow jumped away with Raeburn and Tom after him.

V

WALSCHER was unconsious. Old Tom had hit him with a belaying pin as Walscher, on his knees, groped at the flap holster.

It was then that the fat-jowled planter had yanked his revolver clear and paused a moment to steady his wobbling hand in an aim at Tom; and Old Bill Barnes, without an instant's pause, took the bullet straight into his own breast, took it with a straight-eyed jump right at the mouth of the gun and went down.

The flabby-faced fellow, in a kind of panic, shot again and again, splintering the deck about the wounded man and again hitting him; but his gun snapped on an empty shell as Old Tom made for him, and he ran.

Abdul, whose brain worked slowly, stood with sullen glowering, doubtful, glaring about him with a kind of thick-headed uncertainty. He, dully, had no dislike of the bark's men; no liking at all for Heddon, or Pelew, or that strange Chinese. There was no imagination in his bull's head, no fear, no anger, no thought of what would happen to him if the attack failed. The only one he liked was Old Tom, and Tom was not being hurt. Abdul, for all of his size and strength, was wholly unused to fights, to jumping in and taking part; and likely as not he would have stood there, sourly staring, and made no move until the fight was over if some fool sailor, thinking to lay this big devil out, had not hit him from behind with a pin on his bandaged sore head. The bandage deadened the force of the blow, not the pain, and the pain maddened him.

As if stung, he turned on the astonished sailor, and did not strike him, but caught him, jerked him off his feet and threw him sprawling so that the man landed with his breath knocked out.

Then Abdul looked about for the next one nearest at hand. This was Mr. Blake, who, climbing up out of the water on one of the small wet ropes that had been dropped to the boat's crew, was half over the rail when Abdul caught him, jerked him inboard, took a better hold, and threw him overboard—luckily, to be picked up by Sandys' boat that had come alongside.

Abdul, now aroused, ranged noisily along the bulwark, keeping men from coming over to the help of their mates, pushing off such as got into the chains; and the bark's sailors had to look up helplessly from Sandys' boat, where some kept themselves afloat by clinging to the gunnels.

CAPTAIN SCOTT, badly shaken, had got to his feet and looked at the confusion about the deck; then he had shouted over the side for the men there to come and come quick; and turning, he started to help Heddon, who was struggling to get the gun away from Pelew and the gun was going off in their hands as they fought for it. But at that moment he saw the Chinese slash himself free from two men that had jumped him, and Captain Scott ran forward at him. Being contemptuous of Chinese, even armed ones, he struck with his fist; and the next instant, all in a flash, he was ripped across the breast by a thrust that missed his heart only by glancing from a rib. Then Denasso put the revolver he had taken from Walscher's belt to Scott's head.

"You —— hop-head!" cried Captain Scott.

"I don't want to shoot!" said the inexcitable Denasso, in whom there was no instinct for murder.

"You —— pirates!" Scott shouted with hands half raised.

"I will shoot," said Denasso, warningly.

"You'll be hung—all you!"

"I will shoot!" said Denasso, and put both hands to the gun. "If you move—"

Captain Scott swore helplessly.

The Chinese, at the first sound of the fight, had drawn his arm and the knife that he had concealed there, from the sling that had made his left arm appear injured; then, like a man accustomed to think in the midst of excitement, he had unshipped the sea-ladder, dropping it overboard.

This Chinese was not like any other man these men had ever fought; it was as if he had eyes on every side of his head; and it was at times as if he had two butcher knives, so rapidly did he change the knife from one hand to the other. He was as wary as a cat, as quick, and fought all over the deck.

But now two sailors, who had run forward into the galley, caught up a knife and cleaver, came out and made for him as a third sailor jumped into the rigging and clawed himself aloft to be clear of the yellow devil.

At the same moment, from somewhere, Old Tom appeared, empty-handed, swearing breathlessly. The flabby planter had bolted through a door of the after deck-house and disappeared, though Tom had wasted precious seconds running from room to room. Raeburn, drunkenly determined to find him, was still there.

VI

WHEN Heddon had landed on Pelew, Pelew tried to shoot him; and as they struggled, floundering about the deck, the gun was discharged time and again; and when empty, Heddon got to his feet, jumped back:

"You murderous fool! I said no killing!"

"I'll kill you!" Pelew shouted, and threw the empty gun at Heddon's face, and rushed.

Grappling, they went down together on the wet deck. Almost mouth to mouth, Heddon growled—

"Have I got to kill you?" Pelew with curses answered—

"You can't, you dirty —— ——!"

On his feet, Heddon could have knocked Pelew down as often as he came up; but down together it was another sort of struggle, for Pelew fought with arms, legs, feet, and butted with his head.

Heddon again fought himself free and arose:

"You blasted lunatic! Let's take this ship—then fight it out if you —"

"—— the ship! You ——!"

And the untamable Pelew came at him again.

Old Tom had been bowled over by a back-handed swipe from the meat cleaver, and rolling over in a daze, like drunkenness, saw that the Chinese was now cornered against the bulwark amidships, hemmed in by three men, two better armed than he, and the third had snatched up a belaying pin that lay where it had been thrown by some one. Mr. Blake and the sailor with him, who had evaded Abdul by climbing in over the bows, paused to grasp capstan bars from their racks on the forecastle; and as they ran over the deck to help strike down the Chinaman, Mr. Blake slowed down just long enough to knock Old Tom over again as he was rising.

Heddon, taking all this in at a glance, now ran as if running from Pelew, and smashed into the half circle about the Chinaman. Heddon wrenched away the bar from the sailor who had come over the bow with Mr. Blake and knocked the sailor over, but was himself hit, chopped at, badly knocked about, and with blood streaming from him, he swung his back to the bulwark beside the Chinaman whose brittle knife blade had snapped on wood—on Mr. Blake's bar—as he slashed rapidly, helping Heddon.

Mr. Blake, having shown the way, more men were coming in over the bark's bow while along the bark's side some of the other men were climbing out of the water on the ropes, and jeering Abdul, pretending to be about to climb up and and over; and so they kept Abdul watching them while their mates were getting up on the deck, unnoticed.

Even Walscher was staggering to his feet, with a kind of blurred uncertainty staring about.

Denasso had looked aside at the growing tumult, and Captain Scott knocked up his arm. The gun fell. Scott reached for it; Denasso kicked it, and sent it spinning. Scott turned about to run for it and ran into Pelew, who was all over him in a minute. Denasso himself recovered the gun, but looked about anxiously, not knowing what to do.

Heddon, poised with the bar club-like,

glowered at the men who hemmed him in, ready to knock over the first that came at him. He felt the fight was lost, but there was no giving up, not while he could stand.

Then young Raeburn, with a kind of jubilant staggering, came out of the cabin, a revolver in each hand; and with gleeful yelps he began shooting wildly. Startled men faced toward him; but Heddon, instantly realizing that in a moment or two somebody would somehow disarm the drunken boy, broke through the startled men, reached Raeburn, snatched away the guns, faced about, shouted:

"Hands up! Every man of you!"

There was none to urge them on against a sober man, armed as Heddon now was, and with so much menace in the set of his face.

Captain Scott was down, helpless, with a madman on top of him. Mr. Blake, who was a rash fellow, might have urged his men to dare the guns, but, attracted by Raeburn's shooting, Abdul had turned. With a kind of long, unhurried, waddling stride and an angered blank sort of stare, he came to Mr. Blake, caught him as a child catches up a doll, said, "How *der Teufel* didt you gidt pack up here!" and seemed, though without much anger, about to throw him overboard again.

Mr. Blake shouted anxiously—

"We give up!"

Men threw down whatever they had in their hands, and stood there in the rain angrily dejected and shamed.

Abdul, though somehow not quite satisfied, set Mr. Blake's feet to the deck and took away his hands.

Thus, told in detail, was the famous fight made for Walscher's *Jack-Girl;* and news of it, excitedly told as a story of piracy, was soon spread to the four corners of the Seven Seas.

VII

IT WAS so small a thing as a woman's whisper that made the fight end when and how it did.

Incidentally, somewhere among the classic books of the East it is written that the fall of a feather may alarm a spider, which, dropping from its web, will alight upon a Prince; and, being brushed at by the Prince, will bite him; the Prince, thus bitten, dies; and upon his death the kingdom may fall into warring dissolution, so that misery and death are spread far and wide through the land—all as the result of a feather falling. So, says the Wisdom of the East, beware of even the lightly spoken word, be very wary of women when they whisper.

So it was that Woo Lung, Walscher's steward, though almost the least treacherous of men, turned traitor to his ship because Po-Shu coaxed him with the magic name of T'eeay Layeen. And Woo Lung, knowing where the mates' guns were, brought them to Raeburn, who was prowling about, peering under tables, behind doors, looking for the cowardly planter that had shot down Old Bill.

"Now Will, now ain't you glad I didn't turn that snake loose!" said Raeburn.

"No, you worthless whelp! I'd rather fight a snake twice as big than that Pelew."

CHAPTER VII

THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

WITH their newly won prize under their feet, it began to look as if Heddon and the Chinese would have some trouble between them over the disposal of the prisoners.

Heddon frowned darkly and said to him:

"We've won this fight, and I'm not so very —— glad. The piracy of it sticks deeper in my throat than I thought it would."

"There will be treasure," said the Chinaman watchfully, knowing how deeply the word tempted men.

"To —— with your talk of treasure!" said Heddon, who had no faith in it and was anyhow angered. "I made this fight to keep out of prison—" his mouth twisted into a grim laugh—"and have put my neck in a noose to do it."

"I swear to you there is great treasure!"

"Swear all you like! I've lost a friend I'd rather have whole and sound again than all the gold a Chinaman ever saw. If Old Bill don't die, he'll be always a cripple. His leg's shattered and he's got a hole in his breast."

"So many prisoners kept here, they may take the ship from us. Put them there, I tell you." He pointed toward the wreck, meaning that the bark's men were to be left there to drown or to be taken off as their luck might determine.

"You, you tell me! See here, an' don't forget it. I give the orders about this deck as long as she stays afloat!"

The Chinese gave him a long straight searching look, then answered reasonably enough:

"They drown, what matter? But if we are caught, we all be put to painful death."

"What matter, eh? I don't suppose a drowned man cares whether he was knocked overboard in a fight, or having lost the fight was made to walk the plank. But I care which we do. That hulk may float for a week or go down in an hour. But anyhow I don't leave men on her. I made the fight to take this ship, and if need be—" this with a look that the Chinese accepted impassively—"I'll make another fight right here on this deck to see that these men get safely ashore. And if you think it's because I hope to have them speak the better of me and so ease the pirate-sentence in case I'm caught, you know —— little of British justice, and nothing at all of how I feel about this mess."

"You sorry, eh?" The Chinaman, standing very tall and straight, asked it not with scorn but as if really interested.

"Sorry? You're right I'm sorry, sorry I ever met Walscher there on the beach. One fool thing's led on to another. I thought it half a joke to steal the girl from Old Davy—and this is black piracy. I'll stand by what I've done, but I won't leave whipped men to be drowned. Not to keep my own neck out of a rope, I won't."

Heddon turned abruptly on his heel and walked away, leaving T'eeay Layeen mystified and searching his thoughts to see if he must think this man somehow a coward, not to be trusted, or merely a strange foreign devil, more strange even than other foreign devils. T'eeay Layeen, as a matter of common practise, and with no feeling of anger, simply to be rid of them, had put scores of men to death, In Chinese waters, men without means of ransom, and unwilling to join the pirate crews, expected death.

Now, dispassionately, but without the least feeling of mercy, he would with his own hand have put to death all the prisoners to end the risk of having them somehow break out and seize the bark again. He was willing to make any sort of propitiatory offering to that bad luck which of late months had laid hold on him.

After narrow escapes and the worst troubles that a man can have who still keeps free of locks and keeps a whole skin wrapped about his body, he now again saw the chance to get back among the islands that he knew and where he was known; but now he was doubtful of how far Heddon could be trusted, or whether one who looked and talked as Heddon did was at all to be trusted.

II

T'EEAY LAYEEN'S noble ancestors, perhaps unfortunately for their peace in the House of the Dead, that is, if they were aware of his lawless ways and merciless bravery, had been men of pride and culture; and his own youth had been one of scholarship and honorable instruction. He was as cruel as the finely tempered steel that he loved, but he had the weakness of ancestral virtues and at times was unexpectedly touched by chivalrous bearing in others. He could no more help this than he could help an inward trembling when his sensitive fingers took up rare porcelain or moved along the damascened blade.

Once on a ship he had taken was the son of a mandarin. T'eeay Layeen did not hesitate to levy tribute upon even the highest officials if he caught their fingers; and he questioned the youth in regard to a ransom.

The young man said:

"It is true that my father is the governor of his province; but as he is an honest man and has given, not sold, justice to those who are deserving, he is so poor that he will be ruined by paying the sum you demand. So, rather than that my most honorable father should impoverish himself for a person so worthless as myself, I shall make it useless for you to demand a ransom!"

Thereupon the youth jerked a short sword from the belt of his guard and before any one could stop him, had stabbed himself. The wound was serious; but T'eeay Layeen gave his doctor the choice between saving the boy and losing his own head; therefore the doctor made many prayers, used much care, was sparing of medicine, and the boy was returned to his father with a gift as large as the ransom demand had been. The mandarin, being indeed a man of honor, devoted the money to the relief of the poor.

Another time, among the prisoners was a man of more than middle age who, knowing that T'eeay Layeen was said to have respect for men of learning, made this plea:

"I am poor because for thirty years I have been a teacher who gave freely his services to children whose parents could pay nothing."

The pseudo wise man, who had spoken so foolishly, was at once put to death, for T'eeay Layeen answered:

"What a wretched tutor, that in thirty years no pupil of yours has risen to a post where he could gratefully relieve the poverty of you who helped him to his place of honor!"

When a poor fisherman had been given the choice of joining the pirates or being put to death, he answered:

"I choose death, that my dutiful son may never feel the disgrace of worshipping at the grave of a thief!"

So bold and noble a sentiment caused T'eeay Layeen to bestow a gift upon the fisherman and set him free.

T'eeay Layeen had been known at least once to show appreciation of a foreign devil's courage; this was at a time when his junk, having easily overhauled a small ship on which a mere child of a midshipman, who chanced to be a passenger, fought so stubbornly with sword and revolver after the crew had been captured or killed that T'eeay Layeen gave orders for him to be taken unharmed.

"I have spared your life," said T'eeay Layeen. "How will you repay me?"

"You have killed my friends, and if I could I would hang you!" said the mere boy who, young as he was, had learned that life is of no such value as to make a worthy man tremble at the thought of losing it.

This bold answer from one so young, so young in fact as to have still a glint of childhood tears in his angry eyes, chanced to please the yellow pirate; and in the course of time, through the same agents by which plundered goods went into the hands of unscrupulous merchants for sale in the Singapore markets, the boy was safely returned to Englishmen.

There came the time when T'eeay Layeen, having been badly beaten by an English gunboat that pretended to be an awkward merchantman, determined at any cost to get better cannon than he had; and as it seemed almost impossible to get them safely past the vigilance of British spies and customs officers in Eastern ports, arrangements were made for their delivery at Sydney, and he himself went after them.

When his junk was wrecked, T'eeay Layeen had gone adrift in the dark on a plank; he was in the water a night and almost a day before he succeeded in getting ashore on what was as barren a waste of reefs as any that ever broke the bones and heart of a castaway.

T'eeay Layeen believed in gods; not in their mercy but in their cruelty; that they tried the hearts of men; and as he was not a man to lie down and turn up his toes, he went on, blindly pushing on because his was the courage that drives a man. It was more than flesh and blood that kept him alive; he had the nature that simply does not, will not, give in to pain, to torture; his brain seemed to shut out pain as an Indian fakir does when studding his flesh with nails to make himself appear pious.

His bare feet were cut, they bled, grew wretchedly sore as he pressed along the miles of desolate reef, sleeping on rocks when he had to sleep, drinking deep from tiny rock basins when squalls swept across the reef, being nearly roasted on cloudless days, eating shell fish when he felt the need of food; but pressing on, he knew not where.

British gunboats knew him by report for the one and only Chinese captain who more often than not led his men when they swarmed on an attacked vessel; he was the one pirate in those pirate-infested waters that washed the southern shores of China, and the islands even afar off, who seemed less after plunder than the joy of plundering. The British gunboats respected his more than the other pirate craft they were surprizing and blowing out of the water; but, such is the British nature, that they would have conscientiously blown him the higher because of their respect—praising him for a fighting blighter even as his junks splintered.

It was the qualities that made him feared at sea, dreaded by other pirates, and, at times, regarded as something more than human by his own men, that kept him alive on the reef.

At last he was sighted by *bêche de mer* fishermen, who then as now are a sort of yellow slaves sent out by Chinese merchants to gather sea slugs on the most desolate spots of the earth.

T'eeay Layeen was then so much the wreck of a man, and being there where they knew no man could live, they were at first afraid to come near him; but finally noticing that he cast a shadow they reasoned that, after all, he must be more man than devil.

These were the lowest of coolies, and would have cut his throat for even a brass ring had he worn one; but he had nothing, having lost even the knife which he had thrust into his girdle before leaving the junk. He knew too that if they learned he was T'eeay Layeen they would give him over to their master, who was probably their owner; and that the island merchant would give him over to the British to have favor and the reward. He told them that he had been a servant on an Englishman's yacht, which was wrecked. The fishermen searched many days for the wreck, hoping for salvage, but found nothing.

T'eeay Layeen, lord of the sea, became a *bêch de mer* fisherman and earned his rice until after many weeks their lugger was loaded, and they made for Lianfo to give over their slugs to the vulturous Hoopla. There T'eeay Layeen retold his story of the Englishman's yacht; and though Hoopla was nothing but a stupid buyer and seller of sea-offal, and a very greedy fellow, he recognized that this was no ordinary man. Hoopla revealed how a friend of his, the fat yellow fellow who pretended to be Po-Shu's uncle, had recognized the girl as one trained for the pleasure of a prince, and had much money to pay Hoopla for his services in helping to get hold of the girl.

How to take her from under the hand of the magistrate was a question T'eeay Layeen offered to solve. Let the fat uncle bargain with Hoopla for a ship and men; then he, who had been a sailor, would steal her from the magistrate's house and go out to sea. The white men might wonder and guess as they pleased; and what did it matter that they might even guess right as long as they could prove nothing. Being Englishmen, they would not use the bamboo to get a confession; and any Chinaman who could not lie well enough to deceive the *ying-jens* deserved death by torture as one unworthy of his race. Surely the experienced Hoopla had nothing to fear.

This was done. But at sea in the night the ship began to sink. The crew became frightened rats. T'eeay Layeen, having now no other way of making the fools heed his commands, struck awe into them with his name.

When morning came he saw the wrecked *Dragon*, and having neither food nor water he had made for it; but he knew that if he was returned to Lianfo his life would not be worth so much as a paper prayer, such as is thrown to the wind to keep devils from weddings. The loutish coolies in the boat, silent and obedient enough under his eyes, would tell that he was T'eeay Layeen.

On the *Dragon's* deck, at the first mention of the word "treasure" he had been quick to catch up the word and try what its magic would do with men who had already done desperate work in the hope of getting their hands on treasure.

And now that the bark had been captured, T'eeay Layeen was made very thoughtful by doubt of how far Heddon could be trusted, or whether one who looked and talked as Heddon did was at all to be trusted.

III

PELEW, with swaying roll, like a man half drunk, came up to T'eeay Layeen, stopped short and said with surly boldness:

"Look here, you feller! We've took this bark, now what the ——'s to do? An' where to go? I don't trust that Heddon. I heard 'im tell that old sailor Bill that's bad hurt, as how he wished he wasn't in this mess. This ship or no other's big enough for me an' that —— Heddon—an' me, I don't get off. Now he's havin' them sailors there brought off, an' seems to think he's runnin' things? Are you an' me goin' let him?"

"Those men, will they go with us and work?"

"Them swabs? They will if I say so! I've drove harder men than them to their work, an' kep' 'em there. But what of treaser—if you've lied, God help you! An' if you do, where is it, an' how'd you come to know? Do some talkin', mister!"

"There is treasure," said T'eeay Layeen. "And are you—" he pronounced the word with a little difficulty—"a nav-i-gator?"

"Not me. But ain't you?"

Navigators in the English sense of the word, that is, navigators who could thread a labyrinth in the dark and make a landfall on a moonless night, or in sunlight for that matter, were unknown among the Chinese, whose pilots did much praying to the goddess Kwan-Yin and sailed mostly by landmarks and dead reckoning. T'eeay Layeen had formerly had a yellow pilot who knew more about navigation than any other Chinese among the pirates; but even he—Chinese pilots, not captains, laid the ship's course—had wrecked the junk.

On the lugger he had taken out of the harbor, there had been a shanghaied Englishman to act as pilot and navigator.

"Then what are we to do?" asked Pelew. "An' how are we to get to where we want to go?"

"I can tell the nav-i-gator. And when we see the fire island, find my own way."

"Don't trust that Heddon. See this—" he touched his swollen eye—"he done it! See this—" he turned his head, showing a lump—"he done it! I'm sore all over. He done it! I bet he makes friends with Walscher—then where'll we be? Give him a chance to wiggle out of this, he'll wiggle. But honest, do you know o' treaser?"

"I know an island where a junk was wrecked an'—"

"Junk wrecked! Who the —— wants tea an' rice an' dried rats? You said treaser!"

"There lies gold and jewels. It was a mandarin's junk."

"I think you're a liar. But anyhow we got to get to sea. Them men there they're bringin' off—I'll make 'em willin' to work. Tell 'em you do know o' treaser, an' if that don't fetch 'em, this will!" He swung up his fist.

"You think Heddon not to be trusted, eh. Then what to do?"

"Trusted, no! Look how he jumped me, when I was fightin' for the ship here as much as him! And what to do? I'll tell you. There's that —— Captain Scott. Make him do the figgerin'. Make 'im. I've made 'em in my time."

T'eeay Layeen accepted the suggestion thoughtfully.

IV

ALL the men were taken off the *Dragon;* but no supplies. The *Dragon* lay too low in the water for men to be willing to go down after them; besides they weren't needed as the *Jack-Girl* was well filled with stores intended for Kuplico, and among other things had chickens and a pig or two in crates on the forecastle.

Heddon talked with Captain Scott, then Captain Scott talked with Sandys, who was at last persuaded that he would be better off as a prisoner on the bark than as a free man in an open boat. There was the hope in Sandys, as in Scott, that they might be able to break loose and retake the bark; and in bringing off the other men from the *Dragon,* Sandys used the opportunity to impress upon them how high they would be hanged if they joined the pirates.

But Pelew welcomed his shipmates with a kind of enthusiastic forgiveness, gave them to understand that they could sail the bark like sailors and share in treasure, or be huddled up with other prisoners.

They were doubtful about the treasure in spite of Pelew's enthusiasm; they were low in spirits; but liquor was passed, and every man of them then thought it better to throw in his lot with victors than with those who had lost. More liquor was given out as they set about work, and though the rain held on they did not feel chilled; their courage took on a fine reckless color, and they sang out to one another that it made no difference how well they served the devil now since he had his tow line on them all anyhow.

The men aloft sighted sail bearing toward them; and though there was some talk of standing by to give over all their prisoners, it seemed wisest to crack on and get well away from Lianfo, as almost certainly during the next day or two they would fall in with some small ship.

It was almost night when Heddon, who had been busy all over the ship, stopped short and said to the watchful Chinaman:

"You know, I thought your eagerness to capture this bark was fear of what the old magistrate would do to you for having stolen the girl, but that rascal Raeburn says you're T'eeay Layeen. How about it?"

The Chinaman's hand dropped to the knife at his waist; he made no other move and did not answer.

Heddon eyed the hand on the knife:

"So that's it, heh? If you want to try it, start in!"

T'eeay Layeen said some three or four words in Chinese, but as he said them with his eyes on Heddon, as if speaking to him, Heddon did not notice the three dull-eyed coolies who, in submissive, slump-shouldered humbleness, had huddled together against a side of the after deck-house, keeping out of the way. They stood up slowly, eyed him from under lowered lids, kept their arms folded across their bellies, and each put his hand under his blouse on a knife that

T'eeay Layeen had given him out of the galley.

"Talk English, man!" said Heddon. "I'll answer as best I can."

T'eeay Layeen, who was deep with cunning, and knew how to try the heart of a man, drew the knife he held and dropped it to the deck. Then he folded his arms, as if waiting for something.

Heddon looked at the knife, looked at him, at the knife and again at him; then asked—

"What you mean by that?"

"I am T'eeay Layeen. You take me prisoner, too, and you have pardon for attack this ship. You do that, eh?"

"Why do you think I might?"

"What the gods decree every man must obey. All is fate. My fortune-teller has told that I would be made prisoner by an Englishman on the ship he helped me one time to capture. All is fate. No man can fight against the gods. Now I give myself your prisoner. What is fate is all right. I do not care. You can have pardon and the big reward."

"You're a queer duck."

"You think maybe you do it, eh?"

"You Chinks have funny notions. From all the stories I've heard, I wouldn't expect you to give up like this because of what some fool fortune-teller 's said."

"You do it, eh?"

"It's a good thing I didn't know this when you came on board the *Dragon*. I would have grabbed you quick enough, then. But now, no. We're in this neck-deep together. And yellow man or white, T'eeay Layeen, when I strike a bargain, I stay with it. I won't play Judas, not even on a Chinese pirate."

"You mean you will sail this ship as I say?"

"As you say? No, I won't say that. Not if you were Captain Kidd himself, I wouldn't. But I'll do as much as I can to see that you get safely off, then I'll be glad to forget I ever fought for a Chinese pirate. I don't like the feel of it in my bones."

"You are afraid?" There was the slightest color of scorn in the quiet tone, and challenge in the slant-eyed gaze.

Heddon frowned, took his time to make a choice of words, then said:

"Afraid? Now what the ——'s the use of using English words on Chinese ears? By all reports, you've laid aboard a hundred ships and more, and plundered them. There are some men, white men, that like that sort of thing. I don't. That's all. I simply don't. But afraid? If I was afraid in just the way you use the word, I'd bowl you over now, truss you up, and go about. Old Davy'd welcome me. He'd be world-famous to have you in his hands. But I'll stand by what I've done. If you were the devil himself, as you are about the next thing to it, I'd stay by the bargain. But I'll be glad when it's over and done, as every man is when he bargains with the devil!"

"I know of treasure," said T'eeay Layeen, thinking to touch the very thought that was influencing Heddon.

"Yes, being who you are, I'd say you do. And with the glint of it under my nose, I'll likely be as big a fool as any man. But right now the word's got a mocking sound. I've heard it too —— much the last few days."

"You will go as I say for treasure? I will make you, every man, rich."

"Yes, we'll probably go where you say. It'll be as good a way out as any that I know. Otherwise we'd have to beach this hulk and take to the bush on some God-forsaken island, for word of what we've done will be in every port from Frisco to Singapore as fast as steam and sail can get it there. But let me tell you something, T'eeay Layeen. Don't ever again be so —— ready to make what a fool fortune-teller prophesies come true. An Englishman, he said? That let's me out. I'm Yankee. Be careful," said Heddon smiling grimly, "of the next white man you join up with to seize a ship!"

T'eeay Layeen smiled oddly, very slightly; he spoke again in Chinese, and Heddon scowled, mystified, and did not notice that three dull-eyed coolies sank back into a slump-shouldered submissiveness against the deck-house; and their heads fell with much the motion of a humble kow-tow, for T'eeay Layeen had said to them in the dramatic way of an Asiatic chief:

"Who harms this man, dies! Guard him!"

V

PELEW became intensely excited on learning that the Chinese was T'eeay Layeen. This time there was no doubt of having on board a man who knew of treasure! Wrecked mandarin's junk. Ow ho! The fellow had wrecked a dozen mandarins' junks, stored their wealth. Moreover, didn't he know too—so rumor said—of the treasure hidden away a hundred years before by old pirates who had sailed in fleets and plundered the emperor's treasure ships? Sure he did!

Pelew, with stamping flop of bare feet on the wet deck, went to T'eeay Layeen, looked him over with new interest and bold staring; asked him blunt questions, and though the answers were given quietly, all but one pleased Pelew. The Chinese said that Heddon was to be trusted and obeyed.

Though he was the terrible T'eeay Layeen, and knew of treasure, a fellow Pelew really admired, yet Pelew talked to him about as he would have talked to the Chink cook, had the cook displeased him. The cheery Woo Lung, cook, displeased no one; even Pelew, turbulent and quarrelsome fellow that he was, soon began to like the cook; but to T'eeay Layeen's face Pelew said:

"Do you an' that —— Heddon put your heads together to beat me out o' my share, I won't have it! I been cheated too much in my life to be fooled with any more! I'm a bad one, I am. You hear me? You believe me, don't you?

"An' that Heddon, he's not the man I am even if he can navigate. Jus' cause he knows things, I've got to knuckle under. It ain't fair. Education, that's what. An' it ain't fair! On board the *Dragon* we couldn't stick a knife in 'im—had to keep him sound an' whole to show where treaser was. Now here the same! By ——, he's lucky that away. But me, I'm goin' to be one as lives aft like an off'cer. You hear me, mister? I bunk aft an' eat aft, same as you an' him."

Then Pelew swung about and went to find Heddon; walked straight up to him, stopped short and said:

"Now see here, mister. I ain't got no —— use for you. But I own as much o' this here ship as anybody, an' I ain't fool enough to want some trouble on my own ship, though I've made —— pop on other fellers'. I'm a good sailor when I want 'o be, an' when I find a man as ain't, I make him wish he was. I'll do my part o' work, an' stand watch an' watch with you or any man. Between you an' me bygones ain't a go'n-a be bygones—not much they ain't! But here to sea we'd both be bigger fools than I am not to drive 'er on an' get to where that treaser is. An' I live aft, like an off'cer. You hear me? An' I eat an' drink the same as you an' that Say-Lean. You hear me?"

"Live where you please, and eat whatever there is to eat. But drink—there's too many bottles on board of every kind of booze. I'll keep the keys."

"You mean—"

"That's what I mean," said Heddon. "I'll do what drinking I —— well please, but no other man'll do more than pleases me. You can be first mate and owner too, for all I care. But I'm the skipper."

"I catch you drunk, I'll throw you overboard!"

"Do that, Pelew—if you catch me drunk."

Heddon wholly distrusted him, thought him half of a madman, but halfway liked his unabashed boldness; and knew, too, that whatever else the rascal lacked he was not lacking in a willingness to fight anybody for almost any reason. His bravado was not bluff.

"An' how about the guns on board?" Pelew inquired. "They're all right now to sea, but when we get to where treaser is, them as has the guns'll have the other fellers at their mercy. An' me, I don't trust you or no —— man—not when there's treaser to be stole."

"What d'you suggest?"

"Me," said Pelew, "I say, when we sight the island Say Lean points out, that we heave 'em overboard. Gun gives a coward too much 'vantage. An' I don't trust no —— man when there's somepin to be stole."

"That's fair. So when we sight the island we'll heave 'em overboard."

"But how'll I know you don't stow a gun or two away, huh?"

"You won't. But I won't—if I say not."

"Maybe so an' maybe not. I'll check them guns up myself. But, mister, ain't it queer luck the way when we was lookin' for treaser we come to get hold of Say Lean?"

"Got hold of him? You've stuck your jib boom aft, Pelew, He's got hold of us!"

"Not much he ain't! He's our pris'ner. An' you an' me, mister, we'll do watch an' watch—an' watch 'im clost!"

"Old Wateman's been a square rig mate. He can take a watch."

"That's better still," said Pelew. "He's only half a runt, but the way he cracked ol' Walscher's head for 'im shows he ain't a fool like you about hurtin' fellers. But here at sea, I'll be perlite to you if you be perlite to me. I ain't wantin' to spoil the chanct to be rich by—"

"But how about the piracy of it, Pelew?"

"Pir'cy be ——! I don't care what I am if it gets me money. I went to sea when I was a kid an' a drunk cap'n beat me over the head ever' day. I swore when I growed up I'd make life ——, or try to, f'r ever' cap'n I sailed with. I done it too. But now on this here ship nobody's goin' make trouble. I won't have it. This here is part my ship, an' if you sail 'er hard, I'll treat you perlite."

Pelew also stirred up the uneasy crew to eagerness. They wouldn't, he said in overriding some of the fears expressed, get hung no higher because this Chink was Say Lean hisself than if he was just a Chinaman who happened to know where a wreck was. Here was a chance to get good an' rich. Hadn't he, and other fellows among 'em as well, done what was bad as pir'cy without getting more out of the risk than could be looted in the cabin of some stinkin' trader? Aye! Hadn't they, if it come to what was what, done pir'cy on the *Dragon?* Wasn't it pir'cy too when they agreed to sail the bark? An' now because they found a real pirate was on board, was they goin' get scared! Now they could be rich men. The Chinaman had promised. Wasn't he their prisoner? Didn't he have to show 'em where the stuff was hid? Couldn't they then take as much as they wanted an' sail off again?

The men were influenced; and one fellow, with that odd casuistry which rascals who are timid about looking themselves straight in the face use, said:

"Aye, we'll be doin' right to take all that stole stuff from a yeller pirate! He stole it from white men in the firs' place. It's as much ourn as his."

THE rain held on, now little more than a drizzle, now flooding the scuppers; but the crew, touched up a bit from time to time with a bottle, seemed not to mind. Men were nervous, excited, very weary and a little afraid of their prisoners.

After the jibs had been set, the bark's crew, together with Walscher and his planter friend, were roped off in the bows. They were given a sail and permitted to stretch it for an awning; blankets were tossed in, and a bottle of whisky was poured into a kettle of hot coffee. Mess-kits were shoved in under the rope. Lanterns were tied to the dead-line rope, and word was passed that whoever attempted to sneak through or rush would be shot.

There was no trouble. Heddon, being made of iron, took no more than an hour's sleep to make up for two sleepless nights, and T'eeay Layeen took no sleep, but moved about in shadow-like silence, appearing suddenly and vanishing. Every time the guards were changed forward they were found to be dozing; but as they were stationed some distance back from the dead-line, and in the darkness, their sleepiness was not noticed by those in the bows, where, although there were very few who slept, none tried to rush the deck. Walscher cursed and groaned, his planter friend blubbered; Captain Scott broke long periods of silence to swear at both of them; and from time to time some men kicked into wakefulness others who moaned in their sleep.

An anxious two nights passed before a schooner was sighted about noon the second day, and the bark flung up a distress signal. The schooner was the *Rosa Meade*, a labor recruiter, outward bound from the Fijis to the Solomons. The schooner captain made a big row when he found what was wanted. He thought that Heddon was a mutineer, and in addition to being indignant at such a sea crime was afraid that if he took off Walscher and his men that he would have to lose time by putting back with them to Lianfo.

Pelew jumped to the rail and bawled: "Mutineers be——! We're pirates, you ol' nigger-catcher! See him there—" pointing to the Chinese on the quarter deck—"that's Say Lean, the Chink pirate! Ask them up there in the bows if you don't b'lieve me!"

The captain stared, spoke with a man or two near by, then yelled for the bark to send over the men.

"Come and get 'em! We've no men to spare in the boats!" Heddon answered.

"Won't do it!" said the schooner.

Heddon saw men hurrying about her deck, and guessed at once what was up. He clapped a hand to Pelew's shoulder, said:

"If we don't look out we're going to be in for it! Get rifles up here and man the rails. Then stand by to get that yard around! That fellow there is up to something!"

Pelew's bold eyes brightened; his wide mouth hung parted for a moment in a wide grin, then he bolted for the rifles. There was a stand of them in the 'tween decks cabin.

The captain of the *Rosa Meade*, evidently thinking that his force would be strengthened by having the bark's prisoners on board, suddenly lowered away a boat. It took three trips to carry off the men; and as the last man went over the side, the bark hauled her yard around, got before the wind and started with rifles from the schooner's deck, less than two hundred yards off, banging away. No one was hit. Heddon and Pelew both led the work aloft, hurrying to get as much sail set as possible. The schooner lost time in having to pick up her boat, then headed out to windward, plainly enough hoping to outsail the bark, bear alongside, drive men to cover with rifle fire and overhaul the *Jack-Girl*.

It was squally weather. The bark, short-handed and heavy with sail, in three hours heeled under in as many squalls in a way that shook men about the deck and jarred the fight out of most of the crew, who seemed to think it better to be captured than capsized.

"Do we carry on, mister!" Pelew shouted across the reeling deck.

And Heddon answered—

"Nothing comes down till it blows away!"

"Hear that! Hear that, you —— lubbers!" Pelew bawled at men who had shouted their fears. "You'll be sailors when we're done with you!"

Whisky was passed. Men drank with gobbling gulps and grew reckless.

The schooner was not much of a schooner, but something of a bulldog and hung on. The Lords of the Wind seemed having a joke. Under the squall flurries, the bark went with a staggering gallop, like a thing in fright, but in the light wind between squalls the schooner had the best of it, and twice came close enough to open fire at long range; then at the end of the fourth hour she ran up abreast less than a half mile off, gybed recklessly and on the new tack began to bear down.

A shower of bullets flew about the bark's deck, and men at the windward rail returned the fire, wildly.

T'eeay Layeen stood on the quarter-deck and did not then nor afterward take cover.

Said Heddon, standing beside young Raeburn to help with the wheel:

"If he's not afraid, he's a brave man. If he is afraid and wants to make us think he isn't—he's braver still. But in either case, a —— fool!"

"How about yourself—standin' here!" said Raeburn.

"I have to stand by a fool helmsman!" said Heddon, and a moment later as a bullet nicked a spoke of the wheel, Heddon struck the boy aside as if in anger and took the wheel himself. The men of the schooner were concentrating their fire on the bark's wheel.

"Why don't you use a rifle!" Heddon shouted at T'eeay Layeen who had come near as if to take the wheel when Heddon dropped.

"I do not shoot good, like Englishmen," said the calm Chinaman.

Pelew's hat was shot away, one he had fished out of a *Jack-Girl's* sailor sea-chest, a good black Sunday-ashore hat; and Pelew, wrathfully, as if the hat were to blame, turned back, jumped to it, stamped on it, then picked it up, looked for the hole, clapped it down tightly on his head, wanting the shade of its brim on his eyes, then returned to the rail and began shooting. He was the noisiest fighter that Heddon had ever seen, but there was no doubt about his willingness to stay in a fight.

"I got 'im, Will! I got 'im!" young Raeburn shrieked, standing up, turning toward Heddon, as the schooner's helmsman reeled drunkenly backward and fell. But another man was at the wheel before the fellow had dropped.

"Shut up, you idiot!" Heddon thundered. "It's not to be proud of!"

T'eeay Layeen brushed with unhurried movement at his ear to drive away the whine of a bullet that lingered there. Bullets were flying all about. A man of the crew dropped, shot through the head. A moment later one of the Chinese coolies threw up his hands, yelled, dropped, tumbled about as if struggling with an invisible devil, then lay still.

Heddon gazed hopefully to windward with a long look at the stormy shadow of a rain-driven squall that was sweeping down upon them, then looked aloft anxiously.

It struck the schooner. All there had their eyes on the bark; the helmsman was taken unawares. His feet slipped from under him and he lurched down the slant-pitch of the deck as if thrown. Her mainsail, spotted with bullet holes, split like a bedsheet, and a moment later the schooner was floundering while men scrambled frantically to get the wild head-sails off her.

The squall knocked the bark scuppers under, but she was stout-hearted, newly rigged aloft. Heddon dangled on the upward kick of the spokes like a man being lifted from his feet in a fight; then Pelew, who had been sent sprawling, he one way, the gun another, got to his feet with that ape-like awkward quickness that made him a remarkable fellow, and helped Heddon hold the wheel until the bark got well before the wind.

Then Pelew stepped aside, jeeringly eyed Heddon, said loudly, grinning as he spoke:

"So that's another fight you got out of without hurtin' anybody! But me, I shot that Scott—seen him fall. Now what you goin' do about it, heh?"

Pelew was not angered. He seemed good-naturedly to think it was a joke, had meant it friendly enough, and was surprized at the way Heddon glowered; but as Heddon made no other answer, Pelew turned away and set up the cheerful shout that now they were all good fighting pirates, with the right to fly skull and cross-bones.

CHAPTER VIII

MADAME AGAIN

THE bark bork on her stern the gilded name *Jacienta*, and at her bow carried as a figurehead the form of a brown girl with spangles on her brow; what all this, name and figurehead, signified no one knew; but all through the islands the bark was familiarly called the *Jack-Girl*.

Heddon called her the "Babel Ship" since she had on board a Dutchman, a negro, Chinese, French, and a hodge-podge of Britishers and Yankees, "—with something of Noah's Ark thrown in—we've got a snake and an ape-man!"

Heddon was grimly sleepless. He drank deep of Walscher's good liquor, without getting the least cheer; the more he drank the more he was troubled with bitter thoughts, and the more bitter the thoughts, why of course the more he drank. But it did no good, affected him hardly at all, except to make him jeer at his friends.

He had been somewhat cut and banged up in the fight to seize the bark, and the bandages were often bleeding afresh from the work; but he soused his cuts in salt water and they set about healing. It was what to do for Old Bill that troubled him.

The old graybeard, who had put in a long sea-life sleeping in hammocks or on straw, often wet, lay on Walscher's own bed; a broad fine one, with a mattress thick as a water keg, but soft and firm. He had linen sheets, white except when spotted with blood. As badly shattered and as full of pain as he was, Old Bill was as interested as a child in Walscher's bottles of perfume and in the big hand-mirror. In the midst of suffering he sprinkled himself with perfume and gazed long at his own features.

"Vanities, these 'ere," he told Heddon. "All vanities. But I like 'em."

Heddon did not believe that he had even half a chance for his life, but lied to him cheerfully. He had been shot through the breast and had, too, a shattered leg.

Heddon was no doctor. He knew that wounds should be kept clean and wounded men in good spirits; so twice a day as best he could he washed and dressed the wounds himself, and was in and out of the room at all hours of the day and night. Woo Lung, who had time for everything, made rice soup constantly, and Heddon flavored Old Bill's drinking water with sherry.

The sea-toughened old fellow was quite sure that he would be up and 'oppin' in a week or two; and he took on a lively, even feverish interest in the treasure they were to get, and how he would spend his share.

"You'll never lean mug in 'and on the parypit of heaven if you don't look out," said Heddon. "At your time in life to sell your soul for the devil's bubbles. You're worse than Tom."

"The Lord 'E's a just man, Will. I've thought it out. An' if 'E's made a man too weak o' flesh to stan' agin tem'tation, why 'ow's the man to blame? No more'n if 'e can't walk, like me now, with a leg broke."

"Your spiritual legs are smashed all right. How about the piracy of it?"

"Eh? I b'lieve in takin' wot the Lord 'E sends an' in forgivin' henemies yer can't lick—but not till arter you've tried 'ard."

"Well you —— old gray-bearded hypocrite, you're good for heaven anyhow, no matter what you do. That hop-head says you jumped straight at the gun and—"

"Aye, Will—" light twinkled through the pain in the old fellow's eyes—"a wicked man like Tom, 'is soul so black an' all. It'd 'a' been wrong to 'ave 'im meet up with sudden death."

"Now you be quiet and don't talk so much. You start a hemorrhage inside of you an'—"

"I think o' Job, Will. An' when pain comes it's like a tussle to see which o' us 'll win."

"Job?" said Heddon derisively. "Job talked too much about his troubles. You, I've yet to hear a groan out of you except when you're asleep. Not much then. You take the pain like a man."

"Wot the —— yer think I am? A womin!"

II

WOO LUNG, the withered old cook, was a man of mystery; and not the least of the mystery about him was how he found time to do twice as much as anybody might have expected, working from before dawn until late at night; but more than that, he was always cheerful, and his clattering tongue was the only cheerful sound on board the bark, but his pidgin-English was almost unintelligible.

He waited hand and foot on little Po-Shu, had somehow dried and pressed her clothes; from somewhere he had brought out Chinese clothes for T'eeay Layeen, and though T'eeay Layeen showed almost a friendliness toward him, the old cook remained still merely the willing busy cook, and found time even to care for the two dull animal-like coolies as if they were his brothers.

"Who is that fellow?" Heddon asked bluntly.

T'eeay Layeen answered:

"The worthy son of a river woman."

"What distinction's in that to make you treat him like an equal? Is he a fellow pirate in disguise?"

"A scholar, who speaks the language of scholars. I have questioned him."

"And cook on a white devil's ship! You Chinamen are queer fellows."

Woo Lung's father had died when he was an infant; his mother, a woman of the breed that has given birth to heroes, bent every effort to make of him a scholar that he might rise to political eminence, relieve the poverty of his relatives and make proud the spirit of his father. His quickness at learning attracted the interest of a famous scholar who took him into his home as a son. Three times the young man went up for the examinations and failed; his mother died, presumably of disappointment. Woo Lung suspected that the lords of examination, who had means of knowing what they were not supposed to know, would not see merit in a Canton sampan woman's son; so, to satisfy his own doubts and make a little money, he took the name of a rich man's son and advanced straight to the degree of *Kyu-jin*, and the rich man's son was rewarded with honor and even appointment. Woo Lung, greatly embittered, sank to drunkenness, then to salt smuggling, was deported, and after many wasteful years went among foreigners. At last he came to the belief that gods are greater than men, and love a man more for what is in his heart and head rather than in his purse; and so he renounced greed and evil ways, and though he became hardly better than a coolie the gods warmed his heart with cheerfulness; and though too he had none of the precious books, he needed none, but would lie awake and repeat to himself passages that he loved from the classics.

Questioned by T'eeay Layeen, he had proved his story by his knowledge.

After that Heddon, too, eyed the old cook with something like respect, as if even with the difference of white skin and yellow skin between them they were yet of the same embittered brotherhood; but Woo Lung had won to the greater wisdom—there was nothing resignedly cheerful about Heddon.

Life on the bark was quiet enough, almost ominously quiet. Vioux hid himself away in one room, drinking heavily and venturing out only furtively, afraid of Heddon though Heddon let him have whisky; Madame remained broodingly secluded in another, and was fed from a tray that the cook brought three times a day to her door. Abdul sullenly did nothing.

Heddon one day knocked the negro Zudag end over end. The fellow had caught three chickens out of a coop and was taking them to Madame. He refused to return them, then picked himself up and went into hiding. One of the chickens flew overboard; the others were put back in the coop. After that just as fast as pigs and chickens could be eaten by the crew they were killed.

"Feed that —— snake our chickens?" said Heddon. "Not much. If he gets good and hungry maybe he'll eat her!"

Pelew, after a few nights aft, had grown tired of living like a gentleman. Nobody aft was talkative enough for him. Woo Lung cheerily rattled his tongue, but Pelew could not understand pidgin-English. Pelew had also taken rather a liking to Tom Wateman. It amused the burly Pelew that one so slight and bandy-legged would be so truculent, for Old Tom stepped on the tails of the men forward as if he were twice the size of any of them.

Pelew liked women, but he hardly got a peep at those aft. The French woman stayed in her room, and young Raeburn seemed to be the only white fellow who ever got a word with the shy Chink girl, he and that hop-head, Denasso. T'eeay Layeen was courteous enough in an aloof way, but showed a lack of enthusiasm in talking of the treasure that he was to bestow on Pelew.

So Pelew went forward into the forecastle where he felt more at home. He would swagger aft to stand the mate's watch, relieving Old Tom, and with a great blast of voice give orders. But if it was a case of all hands, Pelew would rush to the work, scramble aloft, be the first out on a yard, or go bouncing along the deck with the men at his heels. He was, as he had said of himself, a good sailor; but many times when the weather was bad he would call for Heddon, night or day, and say bluntly:

"Mister, what's best to do you think?"

The men in the forecastle were rather content; they were having more to eat than ever before in their lives, stiff jolts of hot liquor three times a day and more often when the weather was nasty, so that if there was much reefing and taking in of sail they went at it cheerfully. Besides, as they said one to another: "Ain't we got a share in this here voyage?" When wet there were plenty of clothes for a change, since they appropriated the chests of the *Jack-Girl;* and when not working, they loafed, smoked, told stories of what they would do with wealth, and gambled noisily—losses to be paid for out of their respective shares in treasure.

Pelew ordinarily, on a ship where he had won the right with his fists to be cock of the forecastle, was a ferocious bully; but now as first mate, bunking and eating forward—something probably no other first mate ever did—he was not, except in occasional flashes of temper, unreasonable. He did not want anything to happen to the ship—"our ship," he called her. The men were afraid of him, and were willing to be humble that he might keep in a good humor, but they were not such fools as to forget how he had treated them on the *Dragon*, or to think that he wouldn't do the same to them again. But they, too, did not want anything to happen to "our ship."

III

OLD TOM had been kissing glass lips, which, as everybody knows, are as faithless though hardly so intoxicating as those of flesh.

"It's Old Bill bein' so bad hurt. I can't stand it!"

"Yes. Your getting drunk does him a lot of good," said Heddon.

"After we get treasure, I'll never touch another drop. Never!"

"Then what good will it do you? You've no other way of being happy."

"'Tain't so. I don't like the taste o' strong drink—"

"No, you just like the feel of it under your belt. I've noticed how you hold your nose to put it down."

"You're the cussedest man I ever liked," said Old Tom, blinking angrily. He was cross-legged on the deck, knife in hand, and though half drunk the blade of his knife chewed quite skillfully at the long heavy piece of wood he held.

"What you going to do with those war clubs?" Heddon asked. He knew very well what Tom, who had broken out a doorway to get the jamb of teak wood, which he had laboriously sawed in two, lengthwise, was making.

"These here are props for Bill. I'm carvin' of 'em, so they'll look purtty."

Raeburn, drowsily smoking, sat before Tom, at times holding the wood as told, taking the place of a vise.

"Crutches should be beautiful," said Heddon.

"Hold still, you!" said Tom to Raeburn, who hadn't moved.

"And you, Jack, loafing here," Heddon told him. "Won't little Plum Blossom be lonesome. The hop-head's sucking the pipe. She's no one to talk to!"

"Hnnh? Oh I get tired," Raeburn answered lazily, "tired o' answering her questions about you. Nice boy like I am, yet she's always talking about you. Lookin' at you, when you're not watching her. Little Chinee girl hab got big heart, Will."

Raeburn grinned maliciously, then:

"Tom, I told you didn't I, that she says that out of her share of treasure, she's going to give Will money enough to buy her from T'eeay Layeen."

"Hold still!" said Tom.

"Treasure!" Heddon told him. "Nobody here will ever see treasure, unless there happens to be jewels on the ax that cuts our heads off!"

Tom raised the knife, gesturing with it, said—

"He's our pris'ner, an'—"

"You've been talking with Pelew!"

"I talked with Pelew, an—"

"And you like being a pirate, eh!"

"Me, I'm willin' to be pirate if I get what pirates get. In forty years to sea, Will Heddon, I done the work of an honest man, an' where's the good of it? I've been drove myself like a nigger slave to save cargo f'r men as never dared put foot on water, or said thankee to sailormen. I seen men cast away rotten ships to get insurance, an' had shipmates get drowned gettin' off! Pelew an' them with him won't stop at nothin'; an' me, I won't lose what they get—I'll do it too, like them, like any man! We've got a chanct now, an' I want riches too!"

"Tom, when you get sober, think this over. A yellow pirate that's cut off men's heads to get their earrings—won't he be likely to cut off other men's heads to keep the earrings?"

"But he's our pris'ner an'—"

"Yes, and he's a yellow man, and we are white. Which means that if he wants he can outguess us ten times a day. Look how he came on board the *Dragon* when she lay a wreck and in half a minute made us all madmen enought to seize this bark. I tell you this, and believe it. I don't think you could tie that Chink up where he couldn't get the best of us, or any man, if he wanted. And don't forget there are four Chinamen on this ship—five with that toy girl, whose hand will fit a knife as well as yours or mine!"

Heddon glowered down at them to see how hard his words hit; and Old Tom looked up, staring, a little disturbed, trying to think; but the young rascal Raeburn took a long draw, blew up the smoke slowly, said:

"But she's never hurt you, Will. She says you big fline man, need little Chinee girl make you velly happy, long time life!"

"For the good of your soul," said Heddon, feeling very much like doing what he said, "I ought to break every bone in your —— body!"

He walked away and went below deck to a brandy bottle.

"And what's more, Tom," Raeburn said when Heddon was out of sight, "for once in my life I didn't lie very much."

That afternoon, just before sundown, when Tom was at Old Bill's bedside, showing the crutch he was carving, Heddon came in, stood for a moment silent, then picked up a sherry bottle. A third remained. He eyed it, paused, turned toward the shellbacks:

"Stand by for trouble. The snake-woman's broke water. She's out on deck now, looking neat as ever, with some dead woman's hair coifed on her bald skull. But there's a new look in her eyes—"

Then he drank the sherry from the bottle's mouth, and tossed aside the bottle.

"What need to be feared of her, Will?" asked Old Tom.

"No need, no need at all for a brave man like you! But I—the minute I saw her on deck, I went and tried her door, meaning to step in, drag out the box, yell for help, and heave it overboard. The door, thank God, was locked. I peered through a port. That snake is loose and crawling about. Little *babee* Baal-Phelgor is hungry. She's out on deck now looking for somebody to feed to him! Tom, go get another bottle of brandy. This stuff here is only sugared water!"

TO BE CONTINUED

TRÄUMEREI

by William Ashley Anderson

PERHAPS the most stirring music I ever heard was the Sudanese reveille. During the holy month of Ramathan, when the Mussulman feasts only after sundown, the reveille awakes the sleeping soldier at midnight. It is a symphony of the desert. It is the voice of the desert itself expressed by sons of the desert. The golden notes of massed bugles rising in the silent night, and the swelling roll of the drums, are thrilling beyond description, because they are the vocal spirit of an intangible something that always touches the soul of man. The deep velvet sky, the glowing planets, the vastness and silence of the desert, the utter absence of distractions, make it a blending of perfect beauty; so perfect that I have lain on my cot under the open sky, looking up at the stars, scarcely breathing for fear of breaking an illusion, as the waves of music flowed over me.

It was the nearest thing to perfection I have ever known, since beauty almost invariably depends upon contrasts, and here there were no contrasts. It was the culmination of an exquisite blending.

In the presentation of beauty I do not care for a display of contrasts, anyway. I feel a sort of pity for the subordinated ugliness.

Once, southward bound for Singapore, the ship was off the coast of Siam, which every seafaring man knows is a place of marvelous sunsets. The heat of the day had been great, but evening brought coolness. After a delicious dinner we were lounging along the starboard railing, well forward so we could look down on the forecastle deck if we felt so minded. But our whole attention was drawn across the molten sea to where the sun was sinking beneath the horizon in a golden purple haze.

The ship seemed to be drifting onward in silence, the engines throbbing like a faint pulse. All the waters of the ocean, turned to seething red and gold, were flowing into the abyss of the sun. There were mottled sea snakes on the surface, and white-crested deep-blue waves flowed alongside.

Darkness came on swiftly, turning these colors to richer hues. In this vast splendor we stood silently gazing. Our hands touched. And then the German orchestra in the saloon began to play "Träumerei!"

My companion's eyes half-closed as if she were being mesmerized by the dying sun and the melody, the vessel floating on in the waves of the loveliest of all lulling music, drowning all lesser sounds.

All at once into my consciousness there came a faint discord that grew more and more on me until I was forced to turn aside. Looking down upon the forecastle deck, I saw a naked man hanging on the railing there, struggling and writhing in the grasp of sailors.

He made no sound except a peculiar moan. I could not figure out what was happening. Other deck-hands ran to him. And presently he was dragged back, still struggling, panting desperately and groaning. A bucket of water was dashed upon him. I jerked a glance up at the bridge to see what the watch thought of the disturbance.

"What's he doing?" I called out.

The ship's officer had to cup his hands to make himself heard above the strains of lovely music—Dreaming! Dreaming!—that still rose about us.

"Stoker! Crazy with the heat! Tried to throw himself overboard!"

AERIAL BLUE

Gipsy Flyers' Luck

By

Andrew A. Caffrey

FOR several months Hal Bulwer and an indefinite number of his flying colleagues had been operating an aerial passenger line—without passengers. Such a line, lacking patronage or other visible source of support, might well be expected to collapse. But the Bulwer Aerial Co. seemed to have a way of its own; it flew merrily along, seemed to be waxing prosperous and, now and then, added a new plane or two.

Clover Field, on the western edge of Los Angeles, was the home port of this self-sufficient organization. Its main line, north, terminated at Bakersfield, some ninety mountain-piled air-miles away. To the south, its other main artery came to earth at Tia Juana, Mexico. The Bulwer Aerial's schedule was regular and the service good.

Good planes have been mighty scarce among the so-called commercial outfits. Whenever a chance came my way to fly a Bulwer ship, I always grabbed it. Hal Bulwer's money was always good, too. Quite often he hired me on for a rush flight.

"With this tail-wind—" Hal Bulwer was talking as we prepared to take off for Bakersfield—"we should knock off this hop in less than an hour."

With him piloting, I was to deadhead as far as the northern city. There, a few days before, one of the Bulwer planes had had motor trouble. Repairs had been made. I was to ferry it back to Los Angeles.

At the end of fifteen minutes' flying we were in over that piled-up hell of bad country snaked out on the map under the colorless name Coast Range. The Coast Range, for some forty-odd air-miles between the San Fernando and San Joaquin valleys, presents all that you can expect of any mountain chain in the line of nasty going. It's bare, and rugged, and cruel, and continuous. Continuous save for a few possible landing-spots in Tejon Pass. The pass is flown when you are just about midway between the two cities. Then you begin to breathe freer and hope for another quarter-hour of good luck.

That day, with Tejon Pass only a few miles afront, Bulwer shook the controls to attract my attention and pointed to the instruments on his dashboard. I unstrapped my safety belt and leaned forward to study the instruments—in his cockpit—to which

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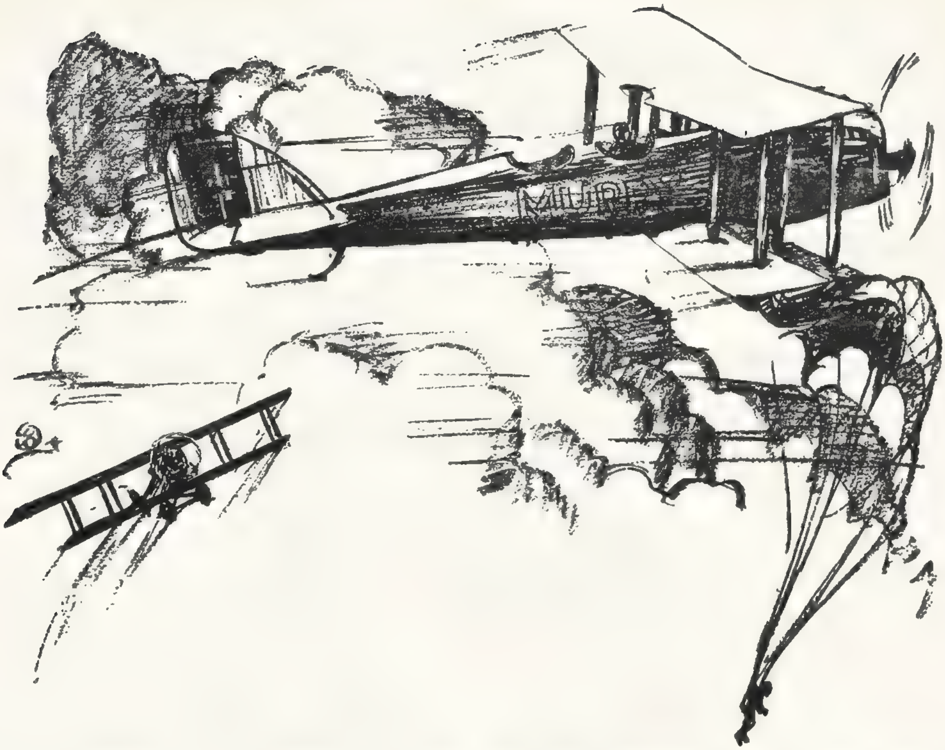
Adventure



he was pointing. The thermostat showed that the motor was red-hot—that was bad. The oil-pressure gauge registered one complete O—that was worse. And the tachometer, which indicates the propeller's revolutions per minute, was steadily on the decline—that was as disconcerting as having a parachute fail to open!

So Tejon Pass was our last and only hope. A motor suffering from such a complication of deadly afflictions has, at best, only a few minutes to live. It isn't going to stage a comeback, and pilots never expect it to; it's going to die; ours did. It just wheezed to a binding freeze, and hope abdicated.

Bulwer, dropping the plane's nose ever so slightly, began nursing a stretched glide for what looked like the best landing-spot in Tejon. Anything out of the perpendicular looked good! Now a plane with a dead motor has to come down. Each plane has a certain safe gliding angle, and usually, a lesser angle—not quite so safe—to which a good pilot can flatten out and stretch his allotted distance. Bulwer knew his plane and what it could do. We had no headway to speak of, the controls no grab on the air. The plane just pancaked, staggered, and oozed down and ahead. The howl and whistle had left the wires and struts and the world was quiet with a sickly awe. And the ground came shifting up and up. Bulwer's try was good but—

Well, that mountain country is hot in the summer-time; and it was August. With hardly fifty feet between our plane and the ground, the hot, rare air let us down. Through that last short space, we went into a spin and crashed. And I woke up at Bakersfield—in the hospital.

The nurses were very attentive; we air-nuts always have it soft when we reach the meat-house. But a mysterious dark man, lurking always within sight of my bed, caused me much curiosity when I was able to sit up and take notice. On the second day of conscious convalescence, the mysterious loiterer introduced himself:

"I'm Deputy Cole. Your flying partner was killed. The law got wise to all that booze you were carrying in the secret wing-compartments and I'm here to ride herd on you. Sorry, old man. I use to be with Air Service myself. You're not bunged very bad—a busted left wing, a few teeth swallowed and knocked kicking and cold. You'll be sitting up—and in the coop—within a week."

You might think that that's a lot, but it makes a fellow feel great to get out so light when he really expected to wake up dead. Being under arrest was the least of my worries. I hadn't worked for weeks and had no place to go; any time I refuse free meals in a nice white "can" such as Bakersfield's—something'll be wrong!

So that's how I happened to be in Bakersfield when, a week later, "Loop" Murry and his flying circus arrived in town. Loop's aggregation hardly amounted to a crowd; fact is, they were four. The Loop, a girl pilot called Aerial Blue, a stunt-man, and one grease-monkey who serviced the planes. The circus boasted two very old planes.

Loop is a pretty good head. He'd play aviation straight—if there was anything in straight aviation. As a next bet, he barnstorms from town to town and strives to please in the fickle furnishing of aerial thrills. The girl pilot, Aerial, was well known on the coast. Just why she monkeyed with aviation is beyond me. There was nothing rough or "sporty" about her. She was a sweet kid, eighteen, and her own woman—all the way! Young "Bugs" Tedder, twenty or thereabouts and as blond and wiry an Adonis as ever filled a bathing-suit and broke hearts, was billed as their stunt-man. Changes from plane to plane, wing-walking and parachute jumping was his idea of an easy way to avoid work. The stuff they pulled was insane, criminally insane.

On Saturday, learning that I was in the hospital, Loop came over to borrow a helmet and goggles; show me a circus flyer who doesn't want to borrow a helmet and goggles, and they're on me!

"Well, dare-devil, what thrill have you salted for tomorrow?" I asked.

"Just a 'chute jump from ten thousand—if I can get the old crate up that high," Loop answered as if the world were drab.

"Who—Bugs?"

"No; Aerial. I can't work the kid at all. He's taken an awful crush on Aerial, off his feed, pie-eyed and all the symptoms. I don't trust the —— fool off the ground at all. She doesn't seem to be able to fall for Bugs—can't see him. On the level—I'm afraid he'll pull a suicide. We've got to make this 'chute jump or stop eating—there's twenty-five bucks in it for us. She's made a few jumps before—says she has, at least."

"You big-hearted, generous devil," I shot at him, "letting this girl risk her neck to earn your daily bread."

"Easy with the whip," Loop pleaded. "I have troubles enough right in the family. Bugs was going to beat me up for letting her do it; I had to spank the kid. He's been yelling blue-murder for two days. Going to tear my heart out if I don't put him back to work, says he'll put me over here in the next bed to you—" he started for the exit—"so, if you see the meat-wagon back up at the door, have your male chaperon turn down the covers. It'll be me."

"Deputy," I said, and wasn't kidding, "that's the bird you should ride herd on. Those nuts kill scores every year—and get away with it."

"Ain't it the truth?" Deputy Cole mused.

Sunday afternoon, when Loop took off and got above the houses, I could watch his plane from the northern windows of the hospital. For three-quarters of an hour, in the intense heat of the San Joaquin, popping and missing, his old plane weaved back and forth above the city, and slowly silenced as the climb increased. That type of decrepit, low-powered plane wins altitude slowly; you have to fight it all the way. Finally, he had perhaps eight thousand feet, Loop's climb ended. The far-off, spluttering drone of the motor ceased—he had throttled to slow up for Aerial's jump—and we saw something long and white stream out from the landing gear of Loop's plane. It was the parachute—Aerial was dangling at the end of its shroud-lines—but it never left the plane.

Deputy Cole's grip on my arm proved that he was an air-man; he got it right away. The parachute had become fouled in the wires of the landing gear.

"She's a goner," Cole mumbled; "he can't land with her there—she'd be dragged to death. And she can't climb back against that wind; a strong man could hardly do it—the kid's done for!"

The deputy was right. A hand-over-hand climb is the fatiguer of athletes. Add the windage caused by the plane's seventy-mile speed and the strongest, I'd gamble, would fail. Desperation might, now and then, cause one to accomplish the impossible, but as we watched, that poor kid showed no such break of luck. She just dangled, twisted and turned—and dangled. And time was going on; that was the —— of it!

That plane, with full gas-tank, could stay in the air for about an hour and a half. At least half of that time was down before Aerial made her try; less than three-quarters of an hour now remained for somebody to guess a way out of this mess. Somebody, while Cole and I gaped and stared like asses, had made the right guess. That somebody was Bugs.

Our attention turned to a car that bolted into the hospital yard on its two off-wheels. Bugs quit that car on the fly, leaped the veranda rail in a flash, and dived in through an open window.

"You, Mace—" he was pulling me toward the door—"don't wait to get clothes—She's up against it!— You can fly our other plane with one hand— Let's go—come!"

The deputy said "Let's go!" too.

Five minutes brought us to the flying field. Ten more valuable minutes were spent when the old motor refused to start, and more than an hour's supply of Loop's gas was gone before we left the ground—Time's never slow when you need it bad. And motors never cause any trouble unless they can cause a lot. Because of the great desert heat, the cylinders got "loaded"; finally we cleared them, the old crock barked a few mild explosions, coughed some more, then picked it up and hit on all eight.

Then, for the next five minutes, the thousands of excited spectators, rushing across the flying field, obstructed my take-off. And time—minutes of that last half-hour of Loop's gasoline—was wasted.

Oh Lord! People are dumb when they shouldn't be—sheep! Nothing but rushing, bungling sheep! And a girl's life hanging by silken threads—thin, silken shroud-lines! People!—who said they thought?

Here and there, right out on the field, separately or in small groups of two or three, women and girls had chosen this as the time to faint or wring their hands and wail. Some of the men were as bad or worse, and the kids, hundreds of them, were out of control. It was a bedlam!

In that confusion, as I tried to taxi the plane to a starting position, I saw young Bugs beating an opening through that mob. He had run amuck, flayed them, threw kids head over heels, mopped up on young and old alike.

When the police had broken out a runway to the open country beyond the actual flying field, I got under way. Bugs came aboard and into the front cockpit as the plane moved across the field. The kid was fine-drawn, rabid!

Then, flying awkwardly—trying to handle throttle and control-stick with my right hand alone—I crowded the ship's climb and strove to reach Loop's level.

Loop, in the meantime, had glided and, seeing that we were taking-off, circled the field at about the three thousand altitude where he now loafed and waited. Aerial, hanging limp and still wildly dangling below the plane, had evidentally spent her strength in struggling and, likely, resigned hope.

The first time I passed under Loop's plane, after getting well into the air, she waved at us and smiled. It was a game smile. She was always a game kid.

Crouched and half-standing in the front cockpit, Bugs studied his wrist-watch. We had an altimeter reading of two thousand feet at the time. He crawled over the cowling and spoke:

"He's been in the air for an hour and twenty minutes; if the tank was chock full when he took-off—we have only ten minutes more. Crowd it! Crowd it, and we'll make it!"

"Just what are we going to do?" I asked. "How are you going to work this thing?"

"Leave it to Loop and me. When we get up to him—you just fly straight ahead and out front."

Within the next five minutes, the other plane had lost a little altitude and we had gained the difference. Then, heading straight into the slight west wind, I set a straight course back toward town and the desert beyond. Over my shoulder I watched Loop coming up from the rear.

Bugs had left his cockpit and stepped to the lower left wing. Then working his way from wire to wire, and strut to strut, he reached the outer end of the panel. Loop's left wing was hovering only a few feet above and behind my rudder by then and I was beginning to tighten up— But just obeyed orders—straight ahead and out front. On my left wing, Bugs was making his next move.

Climbing the outer front strut, he reached the top of the upper wing. On the top wings of that type of plane, you'll notice two small struts and a tangle of slanting brace-wires. This cabane-strut assembly stands about eighteen inches above the surface of the wing. Stunt-men, weaving their feet and shins among these struts and wires, manage to stand upright—hands free—and face the wind. Such a position Bugs now took. Half-facing to the rear, he waved Loop to take him off. This change from plane to plane was the thing they did best.

So Loop dropped back a few yards and shifted to the left of my plane. When the tip of his right wing was just behind and above the tip of my left, he forged ahead once more. For a minute, then, I watched him crowd alongside; at the same time, I watched Aerial dangle, smile and wave; twist and turn in the wind and wave. Always game! The crazy little mutt for monkeying with aviation and getting herself in for this!

Now the planes were wing to wing. I was under orders and straight ahead. Loop was leaning over the side of his cockpit and forcing his right lower wing right into Bugs' hand. Bugs was reaching out and just about to take the wing when—

Over arid country, the air, as a rule, is very smooth. Over green country, or country that is a mixture of the arid and fertile, the going is likely to be very bumpy. Coming into position, we had been flying over the arid land to the east of town. The second that Bugs reached back to take the other wing, we flew across an irrigation ditch on the edge of town, and a bump blew the planes apart.

The kid weaved and staggered to retain his footing—then fell sprawling along the trailing edge of the wing. I saw his hands and arms come through the lower surface of the wing's bottom-side linen as he clawed and fought for a handhold. But he stayed. And I was sweating blood! A kick, you say? Yes, and then some. I wouldn't repeat that minute for a mythical movie salary.

It was more time wasted; and all our time, I knew, was gone. Loop's plane must have been flying on its reputation—not gasoline.

When the ships came into position then, we were out over the hot dry land again. There would be no more mistakes. Set for another try, young Bugs posed like a man of steel; Loop hung out a little farther to the right of his cockpit and wore an expression I'll never see on a human face again— And Aerial dangled and turned; waved, twisted and lurched. Smiled.

I had only one thing to ask, one hope, one prayer—that Loop's gas would hold out—mine didn't. My propeller stopped—dead.

Not for a minute had I given my own gasoline a thought; when the motor quit, my heart action followed suit.

Bugs, at that moment, was just reaching out for his second try. Thirty seconds more and he would have boarded the other plane. But when your power fails—you can't hang there for thirty seconds. If you desire to go on living in this air game there is only one thing to do when a motor konks—start down, and right now. Watch your motor—is the first law of flying. I've always respected and religiously obeyed that law.

For the average circus flyer, the conservation of gasoline is paramount and its procurement no small problem. It's like owning a large car on a small salary; aviation motors simply glut themselves on gas. A few days before, as I learned later, Aerial had flown that plane up from Los Angeles and neglected to refill the gas tank. Take a chance!—that's the slogan of all circus flyers. They do.

Dangling there and watching, that neglect must have come home to Aerial with a bang. When our power stopped and we glided away from Loop, Bugs, in a flash, darted a look of condemnation my way, then discovered the motionless propeller. He grew a little steelier and turned back to Loop; waved him to come on. The other plane, as soon as Loop realized my helplessness, followed down in hot pursuit. As the narrowing gap between planes closed again, Aerial smiled and the kid forced a grim one in return. Then minutes and men fought; and men won.

My motor had gone into retirement at about the twenty-five hundred foot level. At two thousand—perhaps a minute later—the planes were together, wing to wing, and Bugs reached a handhold at the base of Loop's outer left front strut and scrambled aboard.

His passage along that lower wing and back to the body of the plane was phantom-like, something to wonder at—and terrifying. The kid had never been cautious, now he was stark mad. He reached the body of the plane; then, sliding through the flying wires, dropped to the landing gear from which the parachute was angling. Flattening out, belly along the axle spreader-board, he fell to work: slowly, handful after handful, and foot after foot, the parachute and Aerial were coming up.

Pulling that parachute and Aerial's wind-blown weight was more than a one-man job. It was one time where Desperation promised to accomplish the impossible. But Desperation—formerly Bugs Tedder—was, as I said before, stark mad.

As Desperation worked against time, my time, too, was running out. My glide, from the time Bugs left our plane at two thousand, to the ground could not be stretched to exceed much more than, perhaps, three minutes. When instinct warned me to quit watching the rescue and attend to the business of my own landing, half of Bugs' job had been done; the silk of the parachute was all in his arms and only the shroud-lines and Aerial remained to be drawn to safety. I began to feel confident that his strength and fight were going to conquer when—

Well, it had to happen— Loop's gas was out! In my last few seconds of glide, I saw his propeller quit—dead. The kid was fighting, Aerial still dangling at a short length, and Loop had peaked into his glide. Gliding slowly, but coming down and down.

Juggling dynamite is a safe pastime compared to flying the equipment of these barn-stormers. As I got ready to make my landing, my mind was rehearsing the several happenings of the past hour and a half; and I had very little room for one Loop Murry and his ilk. I didn't guess for a minute that their bag of tricks contained any more surprizes for that one day. But I was wrong. Their methods put more thrills in aviation by mistake than through intent.

The field upon which I had chosen to land was plenty large, miles of it; also, quite rough. I had expected a bouncing, bumpy landing, but a safe one. The bouncing-bumpy part came true!

I glided into that field according to the book and by the count; my part, if I do say it, was all right. But how was I to know that Loop and his grease-monkey helper had previously removed the wheels and only temporarily replaced them? From the back cockpit you can't see the wheels.

So, that wheelless axle hit the ground and—strange as it may seem—didn't do any rolling. There was a lot of crashing and spinning and I seemed to be going out, out and out—cold!

When I came to again, back in the nice white sheets, the nurse and Deputy Cole were there; the sun was shining, birds singing, and it seemed that we three had never been apart. That my heedless steps had never walked with bad, fast company. And that Loop Murry and his infernal machines were only weird dreams.

"I'm not here officially," Cole said. "The chief, and the rest of the world, knows what you did yesterday. There wasn't any hooch in Bulwer's plane; and no charge against you.

"Loop made the grade O.K.; they got down whole. Bugs and the girl were still crouched on the landing gear when he made his landing."

An hour later, Loop came in.

"Too bad about those wheels coming off," he said. "I'm sure sorry. But just before I made that flight yesterday, the tires on my plane went flat—porous, you know—and I had to make a quick change. We took the wheels from Aerial's plane and slipped my soft ones on to hers—then, in a hurry, forgot to replace the hub-collars and safety-bolts; when you got into the air, and banked left and right, the wheels dropped off—then, when you came to land, you didn't—"

Well, he was sorry and I had another broken arm, and, as long as I stayed in that hospital bed, they couldn't expect me to fly any more of Loop Murry's equipment, so everything was rosy.

Loop got up to leave.

"Tomorrow," he said, "I'll return your helmet and goggles. In the morning, we're pulling a swell publicity stunt. There's a congress of Easy-Way Church clergymen in town this week and I've got them interested in pulling an aerial wedding."

"No!"

"Yes."

"But I thought she couldn't see the kid."

"——, they always marry the life-saver."

Baldy at the Brink

By the Author of "Strange Fellers"

and "The Legacy Mule"

Alan LeMay

EBEN WARE, whose ax boldly raised its voice above the moan of the deep-hidden waters, was an old man, too old, almost, to be laboring out there on that slippery granite shoulder, a hundred feet above white water. Above him the rock swelled sharply to the crest of the cañon rim, twenty feet up. Just below him it rounded off steeply until it overhung a hundred feet of nothing, with the brawling, seething rapids of the Snowbeard River at the bottom.

Swiftly, mechanically, the ax rose and fell; the smack of the biting blade echoed and reechoed from the monstrous, disordered rock formations that towered over the worker, until the cañon seemed full of unseen axmen.

Eben slipped; the steel of the ax rattled against the granite as he flattened himself on the rock. Cling as he could, only the rope about his waist saved him. Old Pete, at the other end of the rope, hauled on it with an exaggerated flourish, and Eben slowly regained his feet.

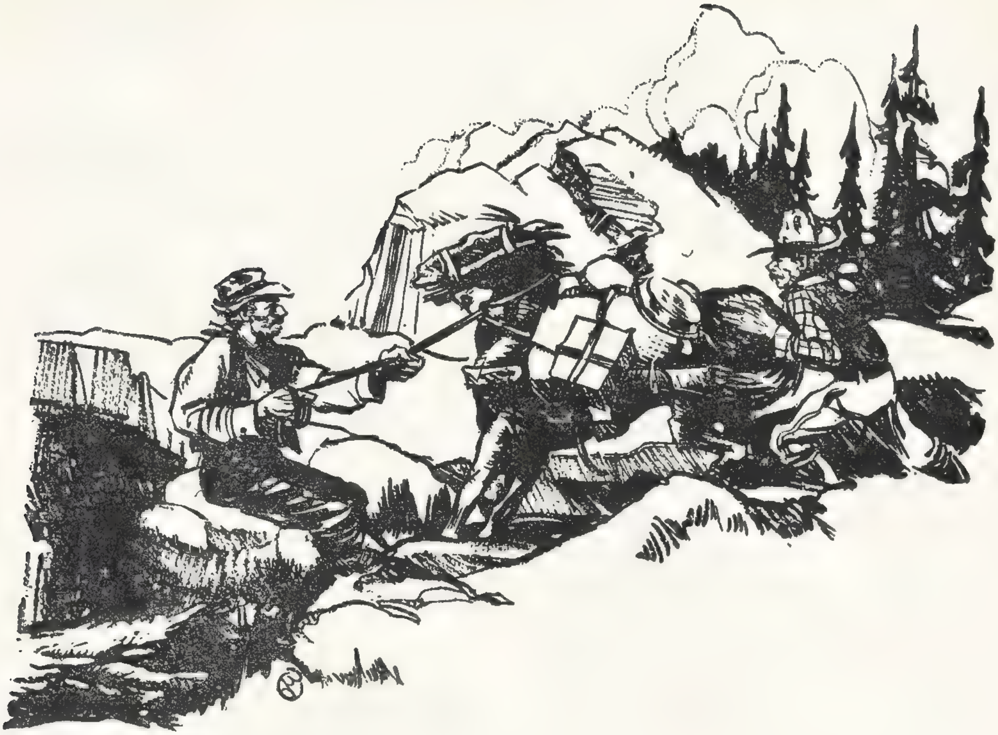
"Don't *do* that!" Pete begged. "Yuh gimme the jibbers."

"Ain't goin' t' fall," said Eben, resuming his work.

"Ain't worried about that. Go ahead an' fall. What I'm worried over is the ax. Yuh near dropped it that time. You better take off the rope an' put it on the ax."

There was no reply to this, and Pete's eyes wandered over their situation. Only sixty or seventy feet from where he sat rose the farther wall of the gash from which came the steady dull roar of old Snowbeard. Only sixty or seventy feet! Yet the gap had never been crossed by man. Upon their ability to span it they were staking a fortune dearer to them than life.

A sort of crumbled notch bit part way into the wall opposite, as if a great stone ax had struck there, ages ago. The one hundred and twenty-foot pine they were cutting overhung the cañon rim, clinging precariously to the granite shoulder by gripping its roots deep into a great crooked crevice. Its top must lodge in that notch, seventy feet away, if they were to succeed. Elsewhere the cañon walls presented a precipitous barrier, harshly carved on a scale so huge that their tall tree was



dwarfed to a match stick, and the men themselves reduced to less than crawling ants.

Eben stiffly climbed the granite bulge. He had been a big man—was yet; but the one time hulking mass of his shoulders had given way to a lean-carved stoop; and his shirt and coarse pants (he still bought clothes of the size he had worn in his youth) draped loosely on his great gaunt frame.

His face was seamed and battered by the years, but his iron-gray hair was still crinkly and crisp; and though his deliberate, almost awkward movements confessed that he wasn't limber any more, the bit of the ax had swung easily, and struck deep.

Pete's leathery, genial face was sober as he slid down the rock to replace Eben. A warning snap spoke from the almost severed trunk, and Pete, suddenly summoning all his strength, laced into the cut with hurried strokes.

Pete, as old as Eben, was of only moderate height, and had always been spare; hence the years had twisted him less than the bigger man. Under a shag of hair as white as the foam of old Snowbeard his eyebrows lay curiously dark, for they had hardly grayed at all; but his mustache was as white as his forelock.

The great tree swayed with slow majesty, as if a harried giant at last moved to crush his puny foes.

"Jump, you old fool!" yelled Eben, jerking savagely at the rope to swing Pete out of the way.

"Timber she falls!" shouted old Pete.

He leaped away from the toppling trunk, skittering sidewise along the granite with a comedy simulation of terror which he did not feel. Eben waited half a second to see that Pete was comparatively safe; then, as they had agreed, he dropped the rope and scrambled for his life.

From the pine came a savage crackling, as if a hundred light carbines had unleashed an ill-disciplined volley. A swish of flailing boughs rose to a roar above the voice of the rapids; then the top struck with a resounding boom and a crashing of torn wood. As the huge stem leveled, the butt tore loose from the stump, sprang ten feet into the air, and bludgeoned down against the granite shoulder. Then at last the fallen tree wedged and lay still.

Their eyes sought each other; then Pete laboriously climbed the rock, and they sat down to rest.

"That's her," said Pete; he spoke loudly that he might be heard above the voice of the deep-laid river. "The hardest part's over, Eben!"

"It's a good thing," answered Eben slowly. "I never see sech walkin' as you led me an' Baldy over last night. No trail, no light, no landmarks; nothin' but leg-breakin' windfalls, an' steeps, an' brush fit t' stop a moose. How yuh knowed the way beats *me.*"

"I didn't," said Pete.

"Wha-at?"

"I never see this place before, except from the far side," Pete chuckled. "I jest guessed at how to come here, an' hit out. I knew yuh'd never come along, if yuh reelized what a slim chance we had o' makin' it."

Eben shook his head slowly, but let it pass.

"D'yuh s'pose Fiddlin' Ben's discovery is as rich as he said 'twas, Pete? I know he wouldn't be braggin', just when he was dyin' that way. But he might o' been mistook, or—"

"Nope," said Pete decidedly, "Ben knew rock. Never was one to overjedge a find, Ben wasn't."

They were silent a bit, weary old men who had traveled all night.

"We was lucky to be with Ben when he cashed in," said Eben. "It shore set me down when he told us about his strike, an' begged us to go stake it thataway."

"He only done that to spite Stingaree, Shadd," Pete commented, and Eben nodded. "A right mean skunk, that Stingaree. Looks like when Ben told him about the strike, he jest couldn't wait to go get his dirty hooks into it. I jest can't figger a man that'd run out on his own pardner thataway, an' leave him dyin' alone. Must be purty stinkin' low, an' that's a fact."

"Reckon Fiddlin' Ben will rest easier in his grave," said Eben," if we beat out Stingaree."

"He's got thirty hours start," Pete pointed out.

"An' good horses," Eben added, "real good."

"But look," said Pete, sitting up. "He has to go way down to the south through Telegraph Pass. Ain't a soul knows a shorter way to get a horse across old Snowbeard—'cept us, an' we wasn't right shore of a way ourself, until that tree struck an' held solid. All we got to do is cross over, an' work out o' the Tall Rock country in two hours. Then Baldy has to push twenty-five miles through the upper meadow country in less'n four."

"An' *if* she can—"

"We'll beat Stingaree to the strike by a good half day," Pete concluded. "Baldy has a lot o' tough miles in her, Eben, an' I ain't much for her to carry. I'll have time to stake the claim, an' get ready to fight, an' have the upper hand easy. All you got to do is foller along packin' some grub!"

"Sounds good," Eben conceded.

Pete roused himself; they had rested too long already, these aged men.

Eben's great awkward strides as he climbed after Baldy were lighter and more hurried, now. Into the plodding determination of his rocky face had come a keener gleam, and beneath their grizzled brows his flinty gray eyes shone like pin-points of steel.

Pete, too, had changed, but in another way. His movements were quick and sure, but in his face had appeared a peculiar uncertainty, as if he were a little dazed at the success of his own plan. Into Pete, for the first time in many a long year, had crept the shadow of a haunting fear.

Perhaps long forgotten hopes were reawakening in the minds of the old men. All their lives, separately in their early years, and toward the last together, they had sought gold perpetually, cannily, shrewdly. In the long twisting mountain and desert trails they had learned the irony of perpetual failure, and the bitterness of defeat.

They were near the end of the trail, these two old men. Wealth would mean a secure haven at the end, and a comfortable peace peopled with the memories of their youth.

Now it seemed actually within their grip at last.

Pete gained a foothold upon the opposite rim, having chopped off such branches as interfered. He instantly turned and started back to help Eben with Baldy, but his partner waved him on.

"You find the way through that rock rubbish!" Eben yelled. "I'll fetch Baldy!"

His voice was lost in the growl of the

waters a hundred feet below, but Pete understood and hurried ahead.

QUICKLY Eben tightened Baldy's pack cinches, and led her to the granite shoulder. The old pack mare was sure-footed, tough and wise; the short slide on her haunches to the base of the tree offered nothing new to her. A hundred times she had been asked to coast down similar faces, with nothing to stop her but a tiny crevice for her heel calks, and a thousand-foot drop into eternity just beyond. It was all in the day's work to Baldy.

Eben slid down the steep pitched bulge of the rock to the tree, and started across. He signed to Baldy to follow with encouraging waves of his hand, but he did not so much as glance back to see whether the horse was coming. He had led the way for her time and again, and she always had followed before. He was nearly across the chasm before he noticed that Baldy had not started.

"Yuh old goat, come on!" he yelled, beckoning with a sweeping arm.

Baldy pricked her blue roan ears toward him, and stared with mild eyes. Her broad white roman nose gave her a sheepish look as she gazed after him from the rock above.

"She'll foller when she thinks she's gettin' left," Eben told himself.

Striding on, he reached the end of the tree, and began to pick his way up through the broken rock masses of the notch. Pete now appeared, astonishingly far above upon an outstanding point. After looking downward for a moment like a scouting fox, Pete began to shout something, and wave his hands. Eben turned to see what was the matter behind.

He suddenly broke into furious cursing. Baldy, instead of following, had disappeared.

With jaw grimly set, Eben hurried back across the fallen tree at a bent-legged shamble. Below, a hundred feet down, old Snowbeard bounded and swirled; here the waters arched in furious swells like the backs of great bounding cats; there gouts of foam perpetually shot into the air from the watery battle with submerged rocks. To a man of the flat country the hundred feet might have seemed a dizzy drop, but to Eben, accustomed to mountain chasms and precipices, the Snowbird was just another creek, running along a few feet below.

Far ahead, up a shallow cut so unmercifully steep that he touched the ground with his hands as he climbed, he could see Baldy's blue-gray haunches, the muscles swelling as the horse toiled upward.

"What the dingdoodle!" Eben marveled. So far as he could see, there was no earthly reason why any horse should go up such a formidable wash. At the top, he knew, there would be nothing but barren tables, a maze of chasmic cracks and a jumble of upthrust rock. He had never known Baldy to show so little sense before, yet there the old fool went, toiling up the futile steep as purposefully as if she were going somewhere.

He yelled at her at the top of his lungs, so loudly that his old voice cracked; and Baldy, swinging her sheep-like face around to look back, stopped and waited.

Leading Baldy none too gently, Eben returned to the granite shoulder on the cañon rim. He slacked off the lead rope as he reached the final steep, and slid down ahead of the horse to the butt of the tree. There he turned and tried to pull Baldy after him.

Deliberately, firmly, Baldy balked.

Eben braced himself and pulled. He yelled, he wrapped his long legs about the horizontal trunk and heaved. It was of no use; the animal's shod hooves slipped a little, inducing her to a mad scramble for footing, but that was all.

Striding angrily across the tree came Pete.

"Git out of the way, yuh long-legged old fool! Can'tchuh handle a hoss yet? Gimme that lead rope!"

Eben surrendered the rope without argument.

"Did yuh find the way out o' the notch?"

"I done so!" exulted Pete, momentarily diverted. "It all come back to me, jest like nothin'. Baldy can get through slick. We're a-goin' to beat him, boy!"

They precariously edged past each other on the smooth tree bole, Eben taking the lead. Pete spoke comfortingly to the horse above.

"'Sall right, Baldy. Pete's here. Ne'mind that stilty old fool that's been haulin' at yore head. Here we go now. Jest foller Pete."

Tugging gently at the lead rope, merely as a hint of what he wanted, he turned his back on the horse, and made as if to cross. Baldy stood fast.

Pete looked back over his shoulder.

"Come on, Baldy. 'Sall right, I tell yuh! Come with Pete, now!" He increased the tugs on the rope without effect.

"Yuh done it now!" Pete turned fiercely on Eben. "Yuh yanked an' hauled at her until yuh got her scared!"

"I started jest as easy as you done," Eben replied testily. "What's got into her? Is there somethin' about this riggin' we don't see?" He uneasily examined the lie of the fallen tree.

"She was born an' raised on worse footin' than that log," Pete spat out, his temper betraying his nervous strain. "There's no use her pertendin' any differ'nt. Yuh yanked at her, that's what yuh done!"

Eben started to reply hotly, but restrained himself.

"All right. Take her over, if yo're so whoopin' smart!"

Pete scrambled up to where Baldy stood, and quietly led her away from the crossing. Slowly, though with trembling hands, he rearranged the pack, loosening the cinches, tightening them again, talking casually to the horse as he worked. Finally he gave her a bit of sugar; and with a great air of casualness, endeavored to lead her on to the log. The result was no better than before.

"All right, Baldy. We'll jest leave you to forage by yoreself. Come on, Eben. We're goin' to leave Baldy behind." He looped her lead rope on to her pack again, and started purposefully across the log. "So long, Baldy."

Without once looking back the two men strode across the log, and began to climb the ragged slope. Not until they were a hundred yards above the fallen tree did they stop behind a huge slab of rock. Cautiously they peered back—

"She ain't comin'!" exclaimed Pete. "She ain't nowhere!"

"See?" said Eben. "Same way she done with me!"

Abandoning their futile subterfuge, they dashed incontinently down the rock slides and across the tree. Eben hurried straight to the steep, unpromising gulley in which he had found her before. The crooked wash twisted away upward into a wilderness of granite and barren, massive havoc; but far above their eyes found it where it reappeared.

"No hoss would go up there," Pete snorted.

"Is that right?" sneered Eben. "Well, there she is, anyway!"

Far above they could now see Baldy, climbing busily.

"Well, fer the lo-ove o' forty million yaller snakes!" exclaimed Pete.

With one accord they raised their cupped hands to their mouths and shouted upward until the rock masses rang with their cracked old voices. Baldy heard, looked around, and stopped.

Many minutes later they reached her, where she stood waiting for them to come up. Back down they went, to try new tactics. Once more they tried to divert Baldy's mind, and lead her in peace to the brink. But this time Eben remained behind her, and it was a slip noose about her throat, instead of her usual halter shank, with which Baldy was led.

At a given signal Pete threw his weight upon the rope, and Eben set his shoulder to her haunches and pushed with all his strength.

Baldy sat down, her four feet braced; then her iron shod hooves slipped on the steep rock, and she began the fifteen foot slide down the shoulder to the tree. Pete slacked off on the rope as Baldy was seen to be unable to stop herself, and Eben recovered his balance. One of Baldy's front feet found a tiny crevice, and she checked a little; then Pete hauled on the rope again, and Baldy slid on.

Suddenly, as the rope slacked again, Baldy made a last frantic resistance. Pawing madly for the crevice her foot had found, she turned herself half around, scrambling desperately to get back up the bulge of rock.

Terror leaped in the eyes of the two old men. If Baldy should miss her footing, their horse would in a few seconds be a broken thing, rolling and tossing down the cañon in the clutch of old Snowbeard, a hundred feet below. There seemed only one chance to save her—by turning her head once more to the fallen tree that meant secure footing. Swiftly Pete took up the slack of the rope and pulled.

The pull loosened Baldy from what foothold she possessed, but failed to turn her head. Scrambling in utter panic she slid down the granite bulge hind feet first, while both men held their breath. Slowly, inch by inch it seemed, Baldy slipped down that treacherous shoulder. Her feet were wide flung, her belly low to that steepening, almost vertical bulge, as she fought frantically to save herself.

Pete yelled, and flung the rope with all his strength toward Eben, who could have saved her, perhaps, from above. But the rope fell short, and the loose end flung itself like a leaping snake into the cañon below.

Then one of Baldy's hind feet found the butt of the tree, and she instantly flattened herself against the curve of the rock and became still.

Had she made a further effort to save herself now she must certainly have slipped over the shoulder into the warring rapids of the Snowbeard, down there below. The wise old horse, however, made no further move, but lay still upon her belly, waiting for the men to figure it out.

Speaking gently, moving by inches, the men approached. Eben secured the long rope, retied it with swift fingers, that it might strangle her no more, and went with it to the top of the shoulder. There he sat down with his feet braced against an irregularity in the rock, and prepared to fight gravity to the last of his strength.

His partner, cheekbones flushed above the cottony white of his mustache, slowly unfastened Baldy's pack, and managed to push its component parts to safety on the lesser slopes above. Then he joined Eben, and they began a tug of war against space.

"Come on Baldy!"

Together they heaved on the rope, and with a wild scramble Baldy came up the slippery rock to safe footing once more.

There was no congratulation in their eyes as the two men looked at each other.

"We've done it now," said Pete. "Baldy'll never cross that stick."

"She's got to cross it," answered Eben doggedly. "We'll blindfold her, an' get her on it!"

"It's the only chance," Pete agreed; but he shook his head hopelessly. "Let's tie her here, an' tote the pack stuff over first. It'll leave her time to steady, some."

They loaded themselves with the great blob-like bundles from Baldy's pack, and, leaving Baldy tied to a tiny bush this time, walked steadily across the moaning abyss. Two trips were necessary before everything was across. As they rested for a moment on the farther rim, Pete looked at his watch, and turned solemn eyes on his lank partner. "Gettin' on toward our last chance, Eben." The endless fooling with the stubborn horse had consumed far more time than they would have believed, even while their impatience made each delay seem long.

"What time is it?"

"Most noon," said Pete. "Our half day's leeway is purty near gone. It'll be a hoss race, now, Eben."

They turned toward the tree again with the resolute movements of men who make a last grim bid for fortune. Suddenly Eben's eyes blazed.

"Baldy's gone!" he jerked out. "She's pawed off her hackamore!"

Pete snapped a fierce glance over the looming topography opposite them.

"There she goes up that —— gulley," he spat out. "We ain't got no more time to lose. Git across there, Eben!"

Leaping and sliding, they plunged downhill toward the tree. Eben, racing in the lead with great plunging strides, rocketed among the upper branches, gained his balance by seizing an upstanding limb, and ran out along the trunk; Pete was close at his heels.

Cra-ack! One of the limbs that had braced the fallen tree top sagged and gave way, letting the top end of the trunk drop a foot, then another. Eben slipped, and his feet shot downward toward the frothing rocks and waters below. His long arms snatched instinctively for the trunk, and for a moment he dangled a hundred feet above the Snowbeard.

Crack! The trunk gave downward a little more, turning as if deliberately trying to drop the old man into the cañon's snarling space.

Pete flung himself out of the tree top to safe ground.

"She's going, Eben! Git back! Git back!"

Steadily, almost deliberately, Eben clambered back on to the trunk. It seemed to his partner that his movements were incredibly slow as he strode back along that slowly rolling, slipping log toward safety. *Crack-crack!* The tree jolted downward another foot, and Eben almost fell.

"For God's sake—Eben!"

With a great leap and a scramble Eben got his feet on solid ground. A limb, twisted by the slow, increasing movement of the great tree, snapped upward and over, knocking the tall man down. Frantically Pete dragged Eben clear of the tangle.

Crack! One last restraining limb snapped. Then the butt, braced against the granite shoulder beyond the chasm, was twisted free and sprung upward, stabbing at the hills beyond; the top rolled clear, and the tree plunged downward with a mighty splintering roar into the turmoiled waters far below. A spout of foam leaped into their vision from beneath, and a hissing wail came into the voice of old Snowbeard.

The two old men stared back across the gap that they would never cross again; and the thought of the death that they had so narrowly escaped was already gone from their minds.

"Wonder," said Eben tonelessly, "why she was so crazy to get up that gulley. Wasn't no sense to it, Pete. Mebbe she's gettin' old, Pete, old an' crazy, like us."

"She run wild in this country once," Pete answered, his voice dull. "Mebbe she throwed a colt up there somewhere's. It pulls 'em back, Eben."

They gazed drearily across the chasm, weary old men, their taxed endurance vanished with their broken dreams.

Pete was first to wrench himself into action. From one of the bundles he tore a cartridge belt.

"I'm goin' to make a run for it," he said dryly. "I guess I still got twenty-five miles under my belt. It's easy walkin', once I make the upper meadows."

Eben did not reply for a moment. He accepted as natural that they should yet fight for Fiddlin' Ben's discovery.

"Not much hope, Pete," he said slowly.

"Nope."

"It would've been a hard ride to make, even with Baldy."

"Yep."

"I b'lieve we could o' made it, if that tree'd stayed put."

"Mebbe Stingaree's hoss," said Pete grimly, "has broke a leg, or somethin'."

"He had three, though," Eben recalled.

Pete made no reply. Instead of putting on the cartridge belt he had taken the revolver out of the heavy holster and stuck it in his waistband. He hastily extracted a handful of cartridges from the belt, and put them loose in a pocket. He could afford no extra weight, this old man who was going to try twenty-five rough miles in an afternoon, without food since eighteen hours before, and without rest for thirty.

"I dunno as I can make the distance," said Eben, falling in behind Pete, who was already starting up the notch.

"Don't try," said Pete over his shoulder as he climbed. "We'll lose if yuh do! Stay here an' rest an' eat, an' when yuh get some stren'th, foller along with some grub. I'll shore need it, by then!"

"You better take some with yuh!" Eben called after him.

"Gotta piece bread in my pocket. I'll eat it on the way. Can't carry nothin' more!"

He cocked his hat to one side and clowned a stumble, gamely humorous to the last.

EBEN sat down wearily on a boulder, and ran a gaunt hand through his crinkled, iron-colored hair. For fifteen minutes or so he watched the wiry figure of old Pete climbing steadily up the notch. When Pete had disappeared he roused himself, and built a little fire. He had little enough appetite, but he must eat if he were to follow Pete with the grub.

When he had eaten he felt a little better. He had not realized before how hungry and tired he was. The moments lengthened, until an hour had passed since the tree had plunged into the cañon, carrying with it their hopes. It was time for him to go on.

If only he had a horse, it would not be too late even now. Baldy was no race horse, but she was tough, and could gallop many a good mile. It would be a race, but there would be a chance. It's all a man asks—just the off chance.

Something moved on the high skyline a quarter of a mile away, up near the top of the notch. Some big animal—a horse, a wild one, most like. It seemed to be surveying the notch, as if looking for its kind. Suddenly Eben sprang up as he detected something familiar in the way the horse stood.

Wildly, clutching at a crazy hope, the old man shouted up the notch.

"Baldy! Baldy!"

The horse turned and looked down. Even at that distance Eben could make out the broad white face against the dark hide.

"How—where—" gasped Eben, racing and scrambling upward over the jagged stone. "It ain't—it can't be—"

But it was true. Baldy, who knew that country as no man could, had preferred to choose her own way across old Snowbeard.

She waited quietly as Eben came up.

IN GOOD OLD COLONY TIMES

by R. W. Gordon

PROHIBITION was first tried out in this country one hundred and ninety-three years ago, a fact that seems to have escaped the notice of most historians.

In 1733 the Trustees of the Colony of Georgia, without consultation or debate, and acting on the grounds of public health, resolved to prohibit rum. This was within six months after the first shipload of colonists had landed at Savannah. By the time that the act was finally approved by the Privy Council it had been extended to cover "the importation and use of rum and brandies."

Although not particularly drastic—neither wines nor beer were affected—this law was found difficult to enforce, it raised troublesome questions through its interference with the commerce of the other colonies, and after a trial of nine years its sponsors themselves attempted to have it repealed.

The following excerpts are from a transcript of the official "Minutes of the Trustees for the Establishment of the Colony of Georgia" printed in White's Historical Collections of Georgia, 1854. The last of them is rather humorously ambiguous owing to an error of the clerk or of the transcriber. Other evidence shows that it was intended to be a complete repeal of the original act and the substitution of one aimed at results rather than at causes.

Taken as a whole, the minutes of the four meetings form a tabloid drama in four acts, a tragi-comedy of colonial administration.

"August 11, 1733—Read a letter from Mr. Oglethorpe, with an account of the death of several persons in Georgia, which he imputed to the drinking of rum. Resolved, that the drinking of rum in Georgia be absolutely prohibited, and that all which shall be brought there be staved."

"May 3, 1738—Committee of Correspondence ordered to prepare an act to enable the Trustees to appoint Commissioners for the more effectual execution in a summary way of the act to prevent the importation and use of rum and brandies in Georgia."

"July 14, 1742—Read an act to repeal so much of an act made in the eighth year of the reign of his present Majesty, entitled an Act to prevent the importation and use of Rum and Brandies in the Province of Georgia, as prohibits the importation of Rum into the said Province from the other British Colonies."

"December 21, 1742—An act was read to repeal so much of an act to prevent the importation and use of rum in Georgia, and also for suppressing the odious and loathsome sin of drunkenness."

That should have ended the affair but it did not. The King refused to permit the repeal of the act in question. The Trustees tried again and again without success. They discovered that it was easier to get a law on the books than to get it off once it was on.

But they made no effort to see that the act was enforced. Not only did they wink at flagrant violations but the jury at Savannah ceased after this to indict offenders. William Stephens, president of the colony 1743-51, viewed the situation complacently. In his own opinion less rum was consumed in the colony after its use was permitted than when it had to be obtained secretly. And in a letter written to the trustees he says:

"A beverage compounded of one part rum, three parts of water, and a little brown sugar is very fit to be taken at meals."

F. R. Buckley

whose stories of Italy you all know

in a

Modern Serial in a Medieval Setting

The *WAY of

I, HUMBLE Brother Simeon, to whose hand the feel of the sword is far more familiar than that of the learned pen, as a penance for two unseemly acts ill-befitting one of my holy station, hereby, in accordance with the decree of the good abbot, set down the whole story of my warrior days, the better to feel meet disgust thereat, especially since in contemplation of that impious period, I shall realize to the full how fortunate was my saving, and how sweet the life of peace. In first, I sinned mightily by throwing soup at Brother Ambrose for talking ignorantly about artillery. In second, my offense was that of doing violence with sword and fists to a young noble whom I found half-drunk at an inn, and otherwise disporting himself most shamefully. Him I cautioned in a fatherly way, but the young blood preferred to take offense, jeering at my monkish garb, and calling me "old woman." Then he had the temerity to bare his sword at me, and (*mea culpa!*) I grew hot-headed as of yore. Ah well, perhaps the youth has learned a lesson that may well serve him in the future. . . .

In my eighteenth year I was apprenticed by my father, a poor musician, to one Messer Porsini, a mercer of good standing in Rometia. Here, my father hoped, I should apply myself faithfully to my task, learn the business, perhaps even marry the squint-eyed daughter of my employer, and in time own a little shop of my own. Below my window I often heard of nights the watch-calls and the clanging of the armor of the guard of the Duke of Rometia, and I felt an irresistible longing to take down my sword from its hook (I had brought it with me from home) and stroll by myself in the dark streets.

One night, when the duke was holding a fiesta in honor of a visiting count, I yielded to the temptation, entered the palace grounds, was inveigled by several of the soldiers to partake of the flowing wine-cups. In this condition I saw two armored men dragging a crying girl. One of the men called:

"Hence, boy, this is no affair of thine."

However, being hot with wine, I whipped out my sword, pierced one man at the center of his breastplate and then had at the other till I ran him through likewise. Thereupon I ran home and fell trembling and panting on my bed. Soon I heard a hammering on the door, and the sleeping household was aroused by the deep bellow of:

"Open! In the name of the duke, open!"

Old Porsini began to quake and ran about frantically, looking for a hiding-place, for he was secretly conspiring against the person of the duke, and he thought he had been discovered and sent for. But they were after Porsini's apprentice, myself, and I was marched off between a file of the duke's guard, headed by a pinkish-bearded sergeant, my hands still stained with the blood of my escapade.

When I was brought into the presence of the duke, I found him in converse with his sister, the Countess Anita. He was imperiously telling her that his wish that she marry a certain count was final, and though she appeared highly spirited, she left the room apparently subdued to his will. The duke then turned to me.

"Why didst thou kill the Count of Monterosso?"

The Count of Monterosso! I stood paralyzed. I had thought both my victims common soldiers. I explained to the duke as best I could, and when

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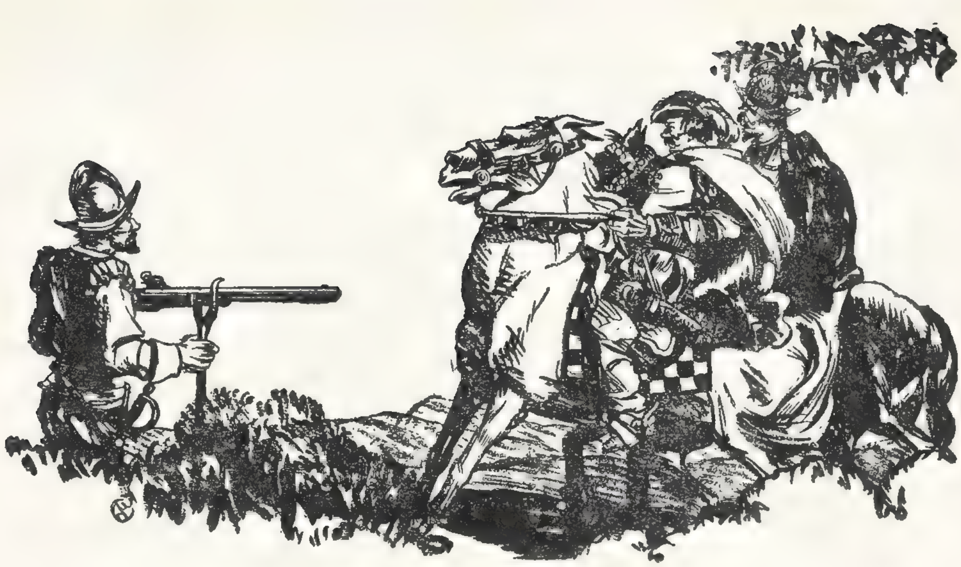
* *This is an Off-the-Trail story. See contents page footnote.*



SINNERS

I mentioned the girl, the duke became incensed.

"The lecher!" he exclaimed. "His lieutenant told me he was out for a stroll."

Thereupon the duke called his chaplain, sent one of his men to find the girl, and when the two were before him, he ordered the chaplain to marry the girl to me, then and there, in order, as he said, to gain two marks with one shot: The count whom he wanted out of the way for personal reasons was dead; and the duke could make a great play of virtue with the townspeople. Since I was loath at the time to accept a place in his guard, the duke gave me a bag of gold (which I in turn gave to the girl), and sneering at my preference for the mercery, dismissed me, saying the place would be open if I should make a choice anew. He gave me, too, a pardon for old Porsini, whom in truth he had found out, on condition that the mercer take me back and treat me fairly.

But Porsini turned me from his door before I had opportunity to reveal to him the paper I carried. Thereupon, seeing me thus turned out, Ercole, another apprentice, stole forth and presented me with a little money he had saved up, for (simple-hearted wretch!) he was under the impression I aspired to the hand of the mercer's daughter, and now, at my departure, I should leave him free to press his own suit. I took the money, giving him in return the duke's paper, to hold over the head of old Porsini as a club, thus insuring better treatment at his hands.

With the money I went on a three days' drinking bout, ending up in a street-gutter, where Stella, the girl I had married so suddenly at the duke's behest, found me and brought me to her home.

In a very short time I had become part and parcel of the Olivieri household, even to the wearing of one of Papa Olivieri's suits in place of my own garments which I had ruined during my drinking bout. It then transpired that, having been promised their trade by a great many of the townspeople, Stella and I opened up a mercery with the gold the duke had given me, and for the nonce, did very well withal. Then Stella, getting into her head false notions as to position and prestige in the community, began to hint that she was too good to work in the shop, that it ill befitted the wife of a prosperous young mercer to wear the clothes she did, and other such nonsense, goaded on and abetted in it by her shrewish mother and an old virgin virago of an aunt. Stella even suggested that I cut an inch or two off the yardstick and thus realize a little more profit on our sales, saying, poor wretch! that all the other mercers did that very thing; why not we?

Soon afterward I was summoned to Rome to attend my father who was dying; he died with my brother's name on his lips, my brother who had run away from home to seek adventure on far seas. For me it was evident that he had nothing but scorn. And thus he died, and with the proceeds that I forced from one of his debtors, I laid him away.

Traveling back to Rometia, I fell in with the pink-bearded sergeant and a troop of horse. They had been waiting on His Holiness the Pope for some message to their master, the duke. We talked of many things, and the more I weighed my own hapless condition with that of these care-free swashbucklers, the more I envied them. When I got home, I found things had gone from bad to worse. Trade had fallen off to almost nothing; our creditors were threatening for their money. And then I saw that Stella had stooped to the littleness of breaking three or four inches from the yardstick. That, what with my disgust with things in general, was the last straw. I made to rush forth into the night without hat or cloak, and Stella cried out piteously—

"Oh, Francesco, where art thou going?"

"Where I should have gone in the beginning!" I shouted—"to join the duke's guard."

MY FIRST assignment in the duke's service was not entirely to my taste, and you shall judge why. There was a certain wealthy count that the duke wished to marry to his sister, the Countess Anita (her former marriage being since annulled). Now this nobleman was enamoured of a famous courtezan. It fell to me to convince her that it were best for her to depart from the realms of Rometia. I forced my way into her castle through a balcony, and after some warm sword play with her guards, during which I killed two of them and received a slight cut myself, I brought the woman to terms, and she sent the writhing, rat-faced little worm of a count about his business. I gave her a parchment with an order for twenty thousand ducats from the duke. Thereupon the wanton made sheep's eyes at me, but I would have none of her.

"Go home then to thy milk and water," she jeered.

So I rode home. I went to Sergeant Lucio's quarters in the citadel, and being worn out, and stiffened of my wound, I slept long and deep. I awoke when a great voice rumbled in my ear.

"What?" I asked sleepily.

"Arise, Francesco," roared the pink-bearded Lucio, "and on the instant! The duke demands to see thee."

CHAPTER IX

OF THE DUKE'S SERVICE

HIS Grace was in his cabinet, writing, we were told, when we had passed the low postern at the rear of the palace, the guard-room, the sentinels on the stair, and came, as on that night long ago, to the corridor where the password was demanded. The captain of the guard himself was on duty here, this being the duke's first night at home, and attempts at assassination more likely than usual, for that he would have reminded malcontents of his existence during the pomps of that afternoon; what I would say here, though, is that I stood astonished that my officer, looking me in the eyes, appeared never to have seen me before.

Worse remained behind.

"Retain your prisoner until I return, Sergeant," says he, clanking away.

"Aye, Captain."

"Prisoner?" I gasped; and Lucio squeezed my wrist viciously, until the officer had turned in at the door of the cabinet.

" 'Tis but the duke's mode of keeping his skirts clean, fool!" he whispered, too low to be heard by the guards who stood staring at us. "Since thou'st done well, there's nothing to fear."

"But—" I began.

"Sssh!"

"The prisoner forward!" came the captain's voice; and so for the second time I came face to face with Alessandro I; dressed now in black, and looking older and wearier than when I had seen him before.

At this meeting he kept me not in suspense, but on my entry pushed away his writing, dismissed the captain forthright and, fixing his black eyes on me, demanded—

"Well?"

Before I could speak, a smile twisted one corner of his mouth.

"Cast not thy speech in the form of defense against a charge," says the duke, raising a hand to shade his brows. "It would be amusing, but I doubt thou hast the wits for the illusion. Therefore tell thy story plainly; there is no crime laid to thee, and shall not be, an thou hast done well— She was at home?"

"Yes, sire."

"Received thee?"

"No—yes, sire. I—climbed a tree."

Again I saw the corner of his mouth twitch.

"And then?"

"She accepted your Grace's offer—"

"Twenty thousand crowns?"

"Yes, sire."

"To absent herself permanently from my domain to a distance of not less than fifty leagues?"

"The sergeant did not tell me that condition, sire; but she said she would retire to Naples."

"H'm. Good— Why, what's this, fellow? Wounded?"

"Yes, sire."

"In this affair? God's body, hast lost thy tongue? Who wounded thee? One of her fellows?"

"No, sire. My lord the count shot me in the shoulder with a pistolet."

Like a flash of black lightning, the duke was on his feet, his eyes blazing out of a face suddenly paler.

"Wast thou masked?" he demanded, his fingers on the little gold bell. "Did he see thy face at all?"

"No, sire."

Still piercing my forehead with his gaze, Alessandro let out his breath slowly in a sigh of relief. His fingers moreover loosed their grip on the bell.

"'Twas wise of thee," he said at last, "for had he seen thee, thou'd have gone within five minutes, where thou'd never have been recognized again— Now beware, fellow! If he did see thee, confess it—better an easy death now, than the flesh taken off thee in strips an he traces thee hither!"

"Nay, sire—indeed."

The duke seated himself and shaded his eyes again.

"Narrate what befell from the beginning," he commanded harshly. "And quickly!"

The which I did; receiving no sign of his approbation or disapproval, until I told how Rosa Salviati had killed one of the men-at-arms, and scratched the count's face in her mad fury, so that he fell down possessed.

"Ha?" demanded Alessandro suddenly, lowering his hand and staring at me with narrowed eyes. "She called him vile names to his face, and then scratched the said face so that he—?"

"Yes, sire!"

"*Gloria Deo in Excelsis!*" says the duke, now ringing his golden bell vigorously. "Captain—send a man at once to my treasurer, and bid him here on the instant."

The captain hesitated.

"He hath retired, sire."

"He is still the treasurer in his night-shirt," snapped the duke, "let him come hither in it—forthwith!"

The door closed; and from the anteroom I heard hasty orders and the hurry of departing footsteps. The duke set himself to pace the room—just as I remembered him to have done months before, when Uccello was expected; but this time his Highness's face was smiling, and he was rubbing his hands together with delight. He even chuckled to himself aloud, which was not his habit in the presence of commoners; a stern and forbidding face was ever his public wear.

"And after this," says he, without looking at me, "how didst thou escape? Sure what were left of the count's men were fain to fall upon thee?"

"They were much shaken by their master's predicament," says I, "and—"

I told him how I had played the noble; at which he burst into candid laughter, and smote me on the shoulder.

"I dub thee il Conte dello Bordello!" he cried. "O Holy Virgin, why was I not there! All amid the silks and velvets—Oh, and blood on the bed and dead men's hair in the sweetmeats, and that *putana* screaming, and old Roberto frothing at the mouth, and thou directing the lightning—by God's wounds, 'tis rare. Here—"

He strode over to his desk and fumbled in a drawer of it; pulled forth a silver disk, glanced at the engraving on its face, and tossed it to me. So surprized was I that it fell on the carpet at my feet, and I must stoop to pick it up.

"There is the first medal of my new order," says he, still laughing in gusts, "the Order of Jesus Christ. Wear it in thy hat; thou hast done well and shalt—"

A knock at the door; instanter the duke forgot me and my well-doing, and my holy decoration for the bullying of a harlot; and stepped forward to greet his treasurer. This one, who had indeed come in his shirt and with aged eyes all rheumy from his pillow, bowed as low as his pot-belly would permit him, and was about to make some ceremonious speech, when the duke broke in:

"Messer Valdifiore—concerning that warrant for twenty thousand crowns."

The old man was evidently not so far awake that he could remember this.

"My steward spoke to thee of it yesterday, fool!" snaps Alessandro, taking him by the shoulder and shaking him.

"Oh, sire—yes. The warrant for twenty thousand crowns to the—to the—"

"Aye. Well, 'twill be presented tomorrow; and thou'rt to refuse it payment. Dost understand me?"

"But, sire—"

"Well?"

"On what account?"

"On account of my order!" roared Alessandro. "Is not that enough for thee? Ah, but— Yes. The ducal warrants must not fall into disrepute, thou wouldst say. Well, then, the signature is not mine—'twas my secretary wrote it."

The graybeard still hesitated.

"But of habitude, sire, he doth sign the payment warrants on the privy purse, and—"

"Ah. But see, Valdifiore; there shall be no telling of this affair abroad. When the warrant comes to thee, thou'lt retain it, as a false document; as to the wench's talking, she scratched the Count Roberto's face yest're'en; without this money, she shall be unable to flee the country; and he'll seek her and stop her mouth for her, I'll swear. So. Do thou as I say."

The count would seek her and stop her mouth for her! He would have her killed!

"Sire—" says I, in horror.

Alessandro turned and glanced at me; and in that glance I perceived that he had meant even that; the mouth of Rosa Salviati would be stopped with death; even as my own heart seemed to be blocked with ice as I saw the depths of this foul treachery. Meantime, the old treasurer, calm and obedient, was bowing his assent as if nothing mattered in the world save the sanctity of the ducal paper; if which were well, all must of necessity be celestial.

"Ye are dismissed," says Alessandro the First, Duke of Rometia, turning his back on us. We understood this as a sign of dismissal and, as best we could, one for the trailing of his nightshirt, the other for the chill that seemed to stiffen his limbs, we went crab-wise, bowing, to the door.

"Valdifiore!" called the duke suddenly, as we opened it to pass out.

"Sire?"

"Send that same warrant to Madonna Elisabetta, at my house in the country."

"Yes, sire."

When I left the cabinet, my captain knew me again; when he saw the medal in my hand, he smiled and nodded his head.

"Thou'lt be lieutenant yet, my lad," he whispered. "Let Lucio lead thee home; thou'rt deathly pale from thy scratch of the shoulder."

Lucio, too, was emarveled at the sight of my decoration; which, then and there, at the foot of the stairs, he must pin to my hat, discoursing to the gaping guard of the future that lay in store for me, which theme I cut through as we gained the street, with one question.

"Who is Madonna Elisabetta?"

"Oh, a whore," says Lucio.

AND as my service with the duke had begun, so it continued, until—

Patience; I am not there yet; it is just that, having returned to that period in memory, I am as eager to escape from it as then I was in the flesh; but I must remember that this history is to serve me as penance, not as pleasaunce—

In my house, at whose door Lucio left me, I found Stella nigh to dead with anxiety; deserted by the neighbors who (judging by the number of dirty plates) had spent most of the day comforting her and eating. So had the duke's business of various kinds pressed on others besides me, that none—not even Lucio—had thought to send the poor girl a comforting word concerning my absence; she was sitting before the cold hearth with a guttering candle, twisting her hands together in her great lap and staring at the doorway with wide frightened eyes.

When I entered, she rose with a sob of relief, made as if to throw herself into my arms; and then, seeing my brave dress, halted as if frozen. I doubt not that the neighbors, in the midst of their well-fed comforting, had cast doubt on the military nature of my night's employment.

"Oh!" says Stella; and I heard all they had hinted, in that word. It seemed I must laugh (so justly had they hit the clout, and so widely had they missed it, in their stupid malice); and laugh I did, my shoulder shooting great arrows of pain down my back at each drawing of breath.

Then I threw my hat on the table and pointed to the shining order on it.

"See that," I said bitterly. "The duke does not give forth Orders of Jesus Christ for—"

Then I started to laugh again, being somewhat light-headed from my enfevering wound. I sat at the table, gurgling with mirth at the services for which his Highness did reward me; while Stella, with face of awe and reverent fingers, examined the medal.

After a while, suddenly, she gave a cry of delight.

"Already!" says she, her eyes shining. "Already thou art decorated and honored. O Francesco, soon thou'lt be lieutenant, and we shall have the bigger house at the corner, belike. Never again will I distrust thy plans, my dear; saidst always that the soldiering would be thy fortune, and—we can have a serving-maid, too, and—"

"Stella!" says I, my laughter ceasing suddenly, and curdling to a hot disgust.

"Aye?"

"The price of that medal is a murdered woman."

She blanched, but she did not drop the bauble.

"Saints defend us! But, Francesco—"

"Ah, nay; the steel was not in my hands. Nay, I but threatened the frail thing, belied her, though God wot—"

"The frail thing! Some nasty—"

"Aye, she was that. How then?"

Stella's eyes grew hot and angry.

"'Tis very like thee to be spreading thy pity on such," says she. "Now, I suppose, thou'lt be leaving the duke's service because it likes thee not. No pity for me, alas!—the settlement we have here, the comfort I was to enjoy for the bearing of thy child—"

"Stella!" says I, rising and trying to take her in my arms; but she repulsed me.

"Stint, stint, 'a God's name!" she cried, beginning to weep. "Thou'lt sacrifice me for any stranger; I am nothing to thee; first 'twas my worship in the mercery that must go to fill the pockets of folk that never would have missed what we owed them—great rich fat beasts whom thou must please before I could have a dress to cover myself withal; now I must go lie-in of a gutter, lest some harlot be hurt!"

"Stella!" I said again; but not comfortingly this time; in a cold anger.

"If thou'rt so full of rue for the animals, go to them—leave me; I shall starve to death a little sooner; and what's that to thee?"

She flung up her arms like a mad woman; and sank into a chair weeping.

"'Tis something to me at least that I am half starved to death myself already," I told her coldly; and sat by the table, my head in my hands, while she dried her tears and lumbered about, not speaking, to get me food.

I had indeed had envy to leave the duke's service, as I had left the mercery, not for the benefit of the strangers Stella had scorned so bitterly, but for the good of my own soul.

There in the dim light in the silent house, meseemed this reason was worse than the other; the thoughts ran about and about in my tired head; to sacrifice this poor girl dependent on me, to any others whatsoever, was base without a doubt; was it not more so to offer up her bodily ease to—myself?

Or was my soul myself? Saints, martyrs, heroes of the church had sacrificed wives, fathers, children to their notion of the right—

'Twas not my soul I thought of, in that word, as I sat there; nay, I called it mine honor; and after Stella had sobbed through my eating; and in bed demanded what honor a clerk's son could have but stinking pride, it seemed a poor hollow visionary thing—though strangely shining—beside the great silver medal in my hat; and the sub-lieutenant's house on the corner—

I reported for duty when the stiffness of my wound permitted; and for three months did naught but routine duty in the palace and the citadel.

Meantime, the power of Pietro Uccello and his band in the surrounding country grew vastly; the band had, by all accounts, ceased its undirected robberies and brutalities and taken to stealing from none save such as robbed the poor—notably our good duke, whose requisitioners were scouring the country raising money for the wedding of the Countess Anita. She must have a dress of cloth of gold; she must have a dowry sufficient to load a train of mules; the city must be decorated, the fountains run wine, the guard have new uniforms, the clergy and the choristers in the church new surplices of finest lace; and for all these vanities the ragged folk in the fields must pay; so that some thousands of other wretches, swinking under a master already, might feel the weight of this yoke as well.

This I thought, but said naught; Pietro Uccello saw it with his eyes, and acted; yea, he fell upon the convoys bearing the peasants' crops and such-like to the ducal market in Rometia, and seized the goods, and distributed them or the money therefor (he would sell them like a merchant, over the borders of Rometia, where held forth a bitter enemy of his Grace; to wit Venice) to their owners again.

Now were his thieveries regarded as most sinful; and troops that had been needed for other use what time he robbed private persons, were detached to deal with him; notably a half company of the guard, under the incompetent sub-lieutenant, which half company (and the lieutenant as well) Uccello's band scattered to the four corners of heaven and hell.

I was on duty as sentry of the upper corridor, as it chanced, when news of this disaster arrived; and never saw I a man in such murderous fury as the duke; what struck me most was that he cursed above all the dead lieutenant—not for losing the lives of the men of his command, but for letting the robbers make away with the convoy he had been sent to conduct, and leaving the danger in wait for the convoys of the future. When our captain, whom also he cursed in the corridor before mine eyes, took heart of grace to say the man had died in the course of his duty, Alessandro struck him heavily in the face:

"What's his death to me, fool?" he roared. "I can recruit twelve dozen like him—or like thee, thou triple idiot—in a week. Crops take time to grow; it will be months ere those starvelings in the country will have gathered enough deniers again to be worthy the hire of a wagon. God's body, answer me but another word, and—"

He stalked into his cabinet, leaving the captain as white as a sheet; then he sent for his confessor; then for his physician (this at near midnight); and at last, when it was within five minutes of time for the change of guard, he rang for the captain, and demanded the fellow that had dealt with Rosa Salviati.

"Thank God thou'rt here," says the officer, great beads of sweat all over his brow. He blew his whistle down the stairway for a man to relieve me; but in such terror he was, that he took mine arquebus in his own hands, rather than I should wait for the relief to come. "Hasten—hasten!"

So for the third time I entered that cabinet; saluted and closed the door.

The confessor was sitting in a far corner, telling his beads with his capouche pulled up over his head; he looked like a wanderer in open country, huddling down in fear of lightning. The physician, trembling so that his jaw waggled to and fro, stood close to the desk at which the duke sat frowning.

"Dare to tell me what thou art and what thou art not," Alessandro was saying to the wretched leech, "and what thou canst and what thou canst not! If I say thou'rt a poisoner, a poisoner thou shalt be, by God's body, and at my whim I'll have thee burned for it to boot, dog!"

"Y-yes, s-sire."

"Have that packet made by tomorrow morn; and convey it to this fellow behind thee. Dost understand?"

"Y-yes, s-sire!"

"Then turn look at him, God's body!" roars the duke, thundering on the table with his fist. "How canst give it to a man thou'st not seen?"

The physician turned pale, unseeing eyes on me, and staggered so that I must lend him an arm lest he fall.

"Then begone!" says Alessandro. "And thou, soldier—hither."

I stepped forward and saluted again.

"Not so near me! Thou reekest of leather. Stand back!"

He regarded me with his black eyes, as a snake regards a bird; but without the same effect; I had outgrown my respect for this prince, and my fear of him likewise.

"Thou hast heard of this Pietro Uccello," says the duke. "He must cease, and I can spare no more troops for his diet; I will proceed against him by stratagem, and the stratagem is this. After thou had served me a little before, I did recall thee as one I had married here, when this Uccello crossed my path before. Is't not so?"

"Yes, sire."

The duke smiled.

"Then 'tis well. He will not know that thou hast taken service with me; and, feigning to bear me hate, thou'lt go forth, find this troop of his, and take service in't. Dost thou understand?"

I understood, already, more than he had said; and my dry tongue clove to the roof of my mouth.

"My physician will convey to thee, tomorrow, a packet of a mortal poison; something painful, to boot; thou'lt watch thine opportunity, and let Messer Pietro Uccello eat it in his food. Dost understand that?"

The confessor arose from his corner, whispered in the duke's ear, and stood by, his rosary dangling from his fingers.

"Aye. On behalf of the Church, the

good father promiseth thee a pardon," says Alessandro, smiling grimly. "On behalf of the temporal power, thou shalt be sub-lieutenant in place of this fool that Uccello killed. Which shall most attract thee, I know not; but mark this, fellow! Fail not! Or if thou failest, fail openly and let them kill thee."

In my mind, over and over, I was saying, "Nay, nay, nay! I will not! I will not!"; but my lips were mute as I stared at the two men before me.

"Well?" snapped the duke. "No thanks?"

"I thank your Grace," says a voice somewhere outside of myself.

"'Tis well. Go."

There was not a soul of whom, in this strait, I could beg counsel; for the reason that the only counsel Lucio would give, or Stella, or even old Antonio Olivieri, would be toward the gritting of my teeth, and the murdering of Pietro Uccello, which I was resolved not to do.

Walking home from the palace, missing my way twice in the short distance, passing friends and fellow-soldiers without replying to their greetings, I perceived the vista of my life in the guard henceforth—this murder, this cowardly treachery that should gain me promotion; which promotion, binding me more firmly still to the duke's service, should force my consent to still more horrid deeds, in the midst of which I should die dishonorably by a victim's resistance or the duke's caprice.

I could not start on this ghastly path; yet—how could I refuse? There was Stella—and from her my poor struggling mind rebounded farther and farther into the past. If 'twas my duty to her that held me to this murder, 'twas that adventure in the great square a year and a half before, that had forced me to undertake that duty; and 'twas the lying perfidy of old Porsini that had brought about that adventure in the square; and at last it was my own father, whose wisdom I had been bound to respect, that had counseled me, knowing his counsel false, to believe Porsini and follow his ways.

There was no sleep for me that night; I tossed for hours; I rose and munched bread and sausage; when the dawn came, I went forth hot-eyed and paced the chill streets; and when, after an hour's troubled dozing in a chair, I awoke to find Stella risen, my temples were burning and my tongue parched with fever.

"I am ill," I mumbled to Stella; and took to my bed; wherein, coming with the accursed package he had been commanded to prepare, the duke's physician found me. He scowled at first; then, having felt my wrist, grinned maliciously.

"This is a fever induced by the mind," says he (it was sweet, after I had seen him trembling before the duke's wrath, for his eyes to fall on me in this state). "Hast thou any heavy trouble, young man?"

Stella was in the room.

"Nay," says I.

"I fear thou deceivest thy leech, my son; but no matter for that; 'tis the country air thou needest; much walking or riding in the open; a little excitement to take thy mind away from—whatever now burdens it. He-he!"

"Then 'tis not grave?" asked Stella anxiously.

The old goat looked her up and down appraisingly, and she shrank from his gaze.

"Nay, nay," says he. "The young man can be up and about tomorrow—nay, the sooner the better; and so I shall tell the duke."

"The duke?"

"Your pardon, signora; I should have said the captain of the guard; I will excuse the young man's absence from duty—for this day. Good morning! Good morning! Good morning!"

He departed joyful; and I, with the packet of poison under my pillow, returned to my tossing and fretting. It seemed my head would burst with my eternal thinking, with the stretching of my brains between the determination not to do this thing, and the knowledge that the circumstances surrounding held me remorselessly to it.

If I could but break through that ring of iron which, since its first forging in my father's house, had expanded and expanded until it held me thus!

It was the next afternoon that Lucio the sergeant came to the house; I was still in bed, though my fever had subsided with the rising desperation of my thoughts.

He looked at me gravely, and said the captain wished to know why I lay there.

"I am ill."

"The duke's physician," says Lucio, pulling his pink beard, "saith otherwise. 'Tis his opinion—"

"He hath not seen Francesco today!" says Stella.

"Is it thy wish that he should, Francesco?"

My eyes met the sergeant's, and I saw he knew much, if not all; then I turned to face the wall.

"Nay."

Lucio stood fidgeting.

"Thou'lt not rise, then?"

"Nay. I am ill."

So he took his departure, graver than when he came, and walking more slowly. He carried apprehension in his heart, and he left blind terror in mine; terror of what the duke would respond to this defiance; of what should befall Stella whenas I was in a dungeon or in the grave. And I call the terror blind because I never saw that since I must leave her at best, I might better leave and live; nor that, though I might prefer a jail to her parents' house, she might prefer their home to mine; until—

Until at the break of the afternoon, when the dusk was beginning to creep up our street, and the mist to rise from the fields around the city, Stella brought me a letter handed in at the door by a scrubby boy; he was gone; he had not known from whom it came; it contained one word and half a dozen hairs.

The hairs—some red, some graying—were from the beard of Lucio di Caporetto.

And the word, traced by one who could scarce write, was—

"FLEE!"

I sent Stella, weeping and terrified, to her father's house, there to stay until I should be established in some other city; I took my sword; the duke's armor I would not touch, but I stole a horse that was tied outside a tavern near the West Gate; and I fled.

Strange!

That with princely vengeance soon to be loosed at my heels; facing an inhospitable world but lightly armed with experience or weapons and naked of that only sure armor, money; nevertheless my heart should be lighter as I rode toward that quenched sunset of purple and yellow, my courage higher than ever since I left my father's house.

And that, though I grieved for Stella as never had I grieved for anything, my mind should seem, for the first time, to be at peace. . . .

CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER X

OF PIETRO UCCELLO

IT WAS mine intention—and long have I thought before abandoning it—here to make as it were a leap through time to the place whereat my path of life forked again; one branch (the which I took) leading hither; and the other leading, God knoweth where. It is not to be forgotten that, so far from a chronicler vaunting bloody deeds, I am a man at work on the salvation of his soul; perhaps also the assistance of some soul not yet imprisoned in the flesh; and so meseemed it was scarce fit to recall and to limn the next three years; whereof the thought maketh me to tremble with a secular delight, and even to walk in the quadrangle so forgetful of *custodia oculorum* as to be staring high heaven out of countenance.

Yet—I lived those years just as much as I lived those others which are to be considered edifying; and who am I to decide what is edifying, and what not? Ere now, I have seen a man saved by the *novelle* of Giovanni Boccaccio, and another driven toward damnation by the "Imitation of Christ." He was in my troop, that first named; yea, when he had thus learned to laugh I made him lieutenant. And whatever lieutenants in other bands and in these other days may be (I think little of them)—the lieutenant in the *condottieri* of Francesco Vitali was of necessity an admirable man; yet when first I saw him, this one oft offended both God and man by his way of life.

He had lost a woman by death; and to prove his great love he was turning himself into a dunghill to raise as a monument in her honor. The proceeding is not uncommon—

Now that I remember, 'twas him I met first of all the band, that night on the road to Venice; I overtook him near-by to midnight in the pitchy dark and the driving rain, and asked him how far was it to the border. Sure between Rometia and Venice itself, we were the only riders on the road at that hour; and as I accosted this fellow, I wondered what might be his need for haste; whether perchance it might not clash with mine own. Accordingly, I had my sword drawn; and in some stray light, he saw it gleam.

"Stand back, fellow!" says he. "Err not, or it will be worse for thee. There's no purse for thee to slit here."

"But—" says I.

"Aye, but—but," he advised, "turn about and go home. Thou'st missed the trail of whatso fat merchant thou'st been following; 'tis easy done on these dark roads; I am one of Pietro Uccello's men, and know whereof I speak; but that 'tis unmannerly for wolf to eat wolf, I'd have had thy brains on the road a minute agone. Besides, we are to lead new lives, it appears. But begone, friend, begone. I am in haste."

"So am I."

"Ah? And whither?"

"Out of the duke's country."

"Ah!" He appeared to consider. "Ah! Art thou, then, of the number of those that have displeased the good prince?"

"Not so much as ye have; but enough."

"Ah! And what is thy name?"

"Francesco Vitali."

He said nothing for some time; then thoughtfully muttered "Ah!" again.

"Meseems," said I, "that since thou'rt on thy way to the border, we might—"

"How dost thou know I'm for the border?"

"Because the road leads thither," I told him irritably, "and thou'rt riding at night."

"True," says he; and I thought I heard him chuckle in the dark. After which he was silent again until I had my mouth open to curse his ill manners and ride on; then he said slowly:

"Well, if it please thee, let us ride together. Is thy mount fresh?"

"Fairly so."

" 'Tis well; I am in haste; I must be at the border by dawn—to join the troop."

" 'Tis at the border?"

He chuckled again.

"Aye. At the border." His horse moved off, and I spurred mine. "Doth that surprize thee?"

"I had thought it was too busy stealing the Countess Anita's dowry."

"Ah! Well, we would not have the poor wench wed in her shift; and besides, his Highness was beginning to send whole armies against us. Perhaps this was known to thee?"

"That—aye. I was in the duke's guard."

He pulled his horse to a halt again.

"The duke's guard? Then how comest thou here?"

"Guardsmen can hang," I told him; and once more he seemed to reflect.

At last he chuckled again; said "Ah!" and shook out his bridle.

"We have conversed enough," says he; "now let us ride. The sooner I shall be out of this —— rain, the better."

He spoke no more; indeed, had he shouted, it would have been hard to hear him over the thunder of our hoofs as we galloped down the road; he knew it well; his horse hesitated not at bends and crossroads, and my animal followed at the other's heels.

"We shall founder the brutes at this rate!" I called to him after an hour or more, as my mount threw up his head and flung a great clot of foam back on my cheek; there was no answer; and I e'en plied the spurs to keep up. Already in the east, meseemed the blackness was streaking with gray, and the stars no longer twinkled at their windows in the murk, but looked forth pale and still like prisoners condemned to die at the dawn. The wind in my face grew colder, and my horse seemed refreshed thereby; the rain ceased, and the night about us became strangely silent, exhaling the scent of wet earth; we galloped on, not pausing, not slackening speed, until of a sudden our hoofs thumped hollow on the wooden floor of a bridge; then, after perhaps a minute, upon another.

The dawn was coming; there was light enough now for me to see my guide raise his hand in token that he would halt; I drew on my bridle and stopped beside him.

" 'Tis Benedetto!" he called suddenly and loudly, while our horses snuffled and snorted side by side.

A voice issued from behind a hedge.

"And who with thee?"

"No business of thine. I answer for him."

Now the hidden sentry stood up; and I perceived that before him was an arquebus on its crutch, leveled at us.

"Thou'st no authority to answer for any one," he said. "I will whistle for the lieutenant."

"Aye, whistle away and get thine ears split!"

"Who's to do that?"

"The lieutenant for one, for waking of him up; and I the other, by ——, for keeping me out in the rain. This is a man that hath run away from the duke's guard—for fear of being hanged. Tell the lieutenant that."

The sentry did not whistle; instead, he kept silence for some seconds, and dropped the whistle; I heard it clink against his breastplate.

"Pass, then," says he. "Follow the right fork of the brook, and they are behind the hill."

Benedetto stretched forth his hand, and took the bridle of my horse.

"I will lead thee," he said. "The road is easy to lose."

"But—" says I.

"Ah?"

"Is the border far?" I asked him.

"Nay. Why?"

"Because 'tis over the border I would be."

"But thou must sleep somewhere, and there are no inns for miles. Come, friend; thou shalt be welcome."

Now, of a sudden, the flesh of my back that had remained warm with the heat of my youth while rain trickled down it, was cold, and I felt the hair raise thereon; 'twas something in this man's tone, so different in its seeming friendliness from that which he had used to me before, alarmed me. I remembered what Lucio, the sergeant, had told me of Pietro Uccello's band, and their murdering of strangers for the joke of it; and with a wrench I pulled my bridle from Benedetto's grasp, and turned my horse's head.

"Halt!" he snarled at that; and brought his hand from beneath his cloak, pointing the muzzle of a pistolet in my face. The sentinel, too, I saw as I glanced to one side, had seized the butt of his weapon and swung it about until it stared at me with its one black eye.

"Come, friend Francesco," said my guide. "Thou'st come so far for thy convenience; this is not far to come for mine. Pass through yon gap in the hedge before me, and be wary, by —— that thy horse bolt not, for a bullet shall bolt faster. *Avanti!*"

I thought death awaited me along that fork of the brook and behind the hill; but if I went not, it was sure here; and so, without a word, I obeyed, and heard Benedetto and the sentry chuckle together as I passed. Then, close behind me, came the *clip-clop-splash* of my captor's horse on the marshy turf of the stream's bank, and we fared forward for five minutes that seemed a year. The light was stronger now; I could perceive that many horses had passed this way before us, and that their track turned to the right by an oak-tree, leading toward the shoulder of a little hill. On this shoulder, I could see the gleam of armor of another sentry; like the first, resting his arquebus on its stand. Benedetto rode swiftly up beside me and wrenched my sword out of its loops.

"Halt!" cried the sentry.

My companion shouted his name, and we advanced cautiously abreast.

"And this other?" demanded the sentinel.

"This is a soldier of the duke's guard, who hath fled to escape hanging," said Benedetto with—it seemed—a chuckle. As for the sentry, he regarded me sullenly; and then, meeting Benedetto's eyes, smiled.

"Pass, then," says he. "But the captain is asleep."

"Is the inner guard set?"

"Aye. Of course."

"Then I will leave our visitor with them, while I go wake him. Forward, Messer Francesco Vitali!"

The main camp of the troop was over the shoulder of the hill, and the inner guard was twenty ells beyond the sentry, on the outer edge of the bivouac. Benedetto handed me over, saluting, to a tall, gaunt man with great black whiskers; spoke to him for some moments in an undertone, saluted again, and strode over to a sort of low tent, pitched on lances in the midst of the sleeping ranks. It was sickly morning; the new light shone on the puddle with a weak yellow-green, the soaked sod exhaled a low-lying mist, and the sky was of a wet gray. The men had no more than dozed throughout the night; it was no wonder that Benedetto's first call into the captain's tent raised half the camp, shivering, on elbows. First, they stared at him, until he disappeared under the crossed lances; then they turned and stared at me; certain of them, cursing drearily, arose and splashed over to where I stood; whereat, with a mighty effort of the will, I commanded my teeth to stop their chattering, stood as upright as might be, and regarded about me with as much contempt as I could summon.

I think it worth mentioning that they did not laugh at me; nor did they ask questions concerning my state from the whiskered lieutenant. In their leather jerkins, they stood simply about and stared like so many oxen, until Benedetto emerged from the tent and came over toward us. I noticed, as he came, that he turned his head from side to side, and I knew that he was looking for a likely branch among the trees that lined the hollow. I even saw the oak he was likely to choose; the which made me tremble in spite of myself.

"Prisoner to the captain," says he, yawning; "and for the rest of you, boot and saddle. We leave in an hour."

"There's no wood about here that will burn," says one fellow who was the cook.

"Thou'd better find some then, my lad," says Benedetto, taking me by the elbow, "for the captain's in no sweet temper today. Forward, Messer Duke's Guardsman."

He gave me a rough push; conducted me to Pietro Uccello's lair; and, standing outside, announced my arrival.

"Send him within," says the voice I had heard three times before in such differing places, "and stay thou outside, Benedetto—within call."

"Aye, Captain."

I bent almost double to enter the tent's low opening; and, standing crouched, gazed into the obscurity for Pietro Uccello; whom after a moment I perceived, paler and leaner than I remembered him, and with a face hardened as by much authority, lying on a sort of truckle-bed covered with skins. He was in his shirt, propped up on both elbows, and he was smiling at me.

"Ah!" says he slowly, "and so 'tis thou, my friend. We have met before."

Without replying, I seated myself on the foot of his bed.

"Stand up!" he roared; and on the instant, I heard the feet of Benedetto come squelching up to the tent's opening.

"With due respect," says I, "to stand up in here is impossible; and I'll not crouch for thee. If I have but an hour to live, as I do assume I have, it shall be spent man-fashion. So!"

He considered me; and when Benedetto called anxiously to know if all were well, told him testily to go to the devil.

"I take this welcome of thine in the worse part," says I, "since I am only in thy hands for refusing to murder thee."

He gave a violent start.

"What? Thou tellest me that?"

"Thou'rt not forced to believe it; I scarce expect thou wilt; in any case, I refused not for thy sake, but for mine. The duke's proposal was that I seek thee, take service with thee and poison thee; his own physician gave me the powder—"

"Which thou hast with thee, doubtless?" says Uccello, suddenly smiling again.

"Nay, unhappily. But—"

"Benedetto!" shouted Uccello, now sitting up on his truckle and waving me to silence.

"Si, Capitano!"

This time he came rushing into the tent, with his pistolet leveled.

"Take this—signor," says Uccello, biting his nails, "and search him to the skin. Look you, to the skin, and miss nothing; 'tis a very little packet of powder, or a little vial, perhaps; mistake not."

Now this I could not understand; sure meseemed it would have been to my advantage, had I had the poison, to bring it forth and prove my story of my captor's obligation unto me; yet evidently, Uccello thought I had it, and was determined to prove I lied. I told him this, unwilling to be stripped naked in that chill air; and he grinned, showing his teeth at me and motioning Benedetto to be on with the business.

The which he did; chilling me to the bone but, as was most natural, finding nothing.

"Well, by ——!" says the captain, when this had been reported; and stared at me for some time.

"Almost," says he, "do I begin to believe thee, thou young fool."

"Why should I conceal the proof of mine own story?" I demanded, shivering and trying to tie my points with numbed fingers.

"I had a suspicion that, though thy story was true, thou'd told me because, at the point, thou wast afraid to carry out thy commission; and had I found that poison on thee, my friend, it would have been ill with thy poor mortal frame. Knowing our sweet Alessandro, I think that, rather than nailing thee to a tree, I'd have had thee swallow the confection. H'm."

"What makes thee think now, that my story was true at all; that—?"

"Oh, as to that," says Pietro, " 'tis three days now that I have known of the duke's most generous intent concerning me. Think not, I pray thee, that I am altogether a fool or altogether ill-served, Francesco. Benedetto, who brought thee here, had waited behind us on the road to meet and welcome the messenger—we thought most like he would come to join us, preferably as cook. Aye. And Benedetto was returning empty-handed, when thou so innocently—"

"I was going to the border. I did not know that thy band was here."

"Then the duke is less well served than I," replied Uccello, smiling. "It is already two days since (finding this country well shaved, and growing very hot to boot) I hired forth my troop to the Republic of Venice, now projecting some small operations against the Sienese."

I stared at him, my jaw dropped so low that my teeth no longer chattered; and he bit his nails and stared back at me.

"Those were two woundy strokes thou gave the count and the lieutenant that night," he said suddenly.

I sighed.

"How now? They brought thee a bride, and a bag of gold and a place in the guard, did they not?"

"Aye; and the duty of bullying women, and poisoning men, and wearing the medal of Jesus Christ in my hat for so doing."

"Ah, then—" says Uccello; and considered me more still. Always he bit his nails—they were down to the quick, and still he chewed them while he thought.

"Thou might," he said at last, "do worse than join me. We go far from here this very morning; thou'lt be in the pay of Venice; and so far as emissaries of the duke are concerned, it is not our custom to let any of ours come to harm. The pay is good, and there is an outfit for thee—two of my men were killed last week, may their souls turn to lead and hang about Alessandro's spirit when he dies. Moreover, I am resolved, if this Sienese business gives me enough gold and spares me enough of a regiment to swear by, to join forces with old Scarlatti—he is with the Sienese this tide—and be a *condottiere* henceforth. He hath artillery and infantry, they tell me, but he is weak in horse. Say yea, and I make thee—no, not a sergeant, thou'rt too young with these old war-dogs; but a corporal; and we will see—"

He went on with golden promises; but it was not these that convinced me. Outside, the cook had found dry wood some time since, and the half-frozen men had warmed themselves by the fire. They were beginning to laugh over the clank of their armor as they donned it; to bandy rough, open-hearted jokes to and fro. The sun, moreover, had risen and pierced the clouds, and the camp looked a cheerful place.

Moreover, and most potently, the soup which was beginning to bubble in the great iron cauldron, of a sudden sent a wreath of fragrance into the tent; and my mouth watered.

"I engage," says I.

"*Bueno!*" Uccello sprang out of bed and reached for his clothes. "Benedetto! Here is thy new corporal. In the second section. Make haste to give him Ugo Falcone's equipment, and bid the cook hasten with that soup."

So I fought through the Sienese campaign without a scratch, rising to sergeant after I had invented the trick (which none else hath had the courage to use since, it seems) of having the front rank in a cavalry-charge carry iron balls filled with gunpowder and with match stuck therein, and fling them into the enemy to burst just before the shock. We did this first against old Scarlatti's infantry, which had formed a most accursed square with pikemen kneeling, their points forward to stick the horses in the chest, and arquebusiers behind them to shoot the men. Ah me! They neither stuck nor shot; the little bombs blew the pikemen over the arquebusiers, and the arquebusiers into ribbons, and we rode over the remnants and stamped them into the ground.

It was for this that Scarlatti refused, when the affair was over, to hear anything of alliance; nay, he flung his gauntlet into Uccello's face, calling him a cowardly dog, and naught but the wound in my captain's right arm saved the spilling of blood.

Nevertheless, we had no need of him; we had many recruits from the Sienese army when that was disbanded; we went into Tuscany over four hundred strong, and with a piece of artillery to boot—a wooden thing banded with iron, and slung between two horses, and as like to shoot backward as forward, but excellent to mention when bargaining for pay. 'Twas Uccello who bargained, being more tolerant of princes than I; but it was I that gave him the wherewithal for his negotiations; as witness, the forcing of all our men to grow beards except those that had good sightly wounds on the jaws; it made them look more veteran; and as witness again, the painting of an imaginary coat-of-arms on their breastplates, and then the battering of it off and the denting of the armor, with the edges of the men's own swords. Thus, while still we were unknown, we gained ourselves a reputation as the former army of a prince, and as old war-dogs.

After the Tuscan business (I came out of it with the gash across my forehead which still itches in rainy weather, and with the place of lieutenant) old war-dogs we were; we had four iron guns, moreover, with carriages for the same; twice as many horse, well armed; and a good company of infantry, which I commanded.

Now Scarlatti was anxious for a union—he had passed a very bad year about Milan, where his infantry had suffered badly from artillery, and worse from fever; and he had not been able to recruit his horse in the north. He had not force enough to sell in Romagna, where a new war was brewing; and as we started thither, he sent us a most piteous letter; the which we returned him, after Uccello had— But no matter for that; what I would say is that in two years, we had become so prosperous that we needed no alliance with any one.

God, it is hard to hold my pen to the paper, and say these cold words! "We had become so prosperous!" quotha! What did any of us care for prosperity? It was life we sought; and with what relish did we snatch it out of the jaws of death!

I close my eyes, and I see the regiment now, making, perhaps, a forced march (we excelled in those, especially in the summer; by the simple means of having a little wagon, drawn by the gun-horses in addition to their load, on which the men piled their hot armor). The blue sky stretched over the brown-green plain, like a bowl turned upside-down on pillars that were mountains; the sun blazing down out of the middle of it; the white road leading to more adventure; the gaping folk in their fields, or at the doors of their cottages, peering out at us from beside great cypresses; the wine and the cheese of the countryside, which we drank and ate marching, and between snatches of songs; at the very head, Pietro Uccello and myself, followed by our flag; then the infantry, sweating and garlanded with vine-leaves to save their brains from frying; a great white cloud of dust; the cavalry; jingling and singing with the guns in their midst, and behind them another great white wake of dust, settling slowly to the road a mile behind—

No matter, no matter; it is all past; that, and the rush of the charge. . . .

It was in a charge that Pietro Uccello was killed in the last battle of the Romagna business.

I became commander of the troop.

CHAPTER XI

OF MY FAMILY

DURING this time of our rise from the state of ragged banditti to that of first-class mercenaries with a flag of our own, I had had little time to think of Stella; though often my thoughts would turn toward my child; wondering whether it were a boy or a girl; what they had named it, and whether it could crawl yet. Whiles, in my mind's eye, I would perceive a small lad much like me, staggering about the Olivieri kitchen, or pulling at Antonio's leather apron as the old man hammered blades; and at such times my heart would contract with the desire to see the baby; play with him; show him his face reflected in my breastplate, and amuse him with such fooleries as I saw my men employ with the village children on our way. But ever it was patent that the price of return to Rometia would be a broken neck if the duke were unforgiving; or, if it suited him to be merciful, a life of that muddy dishonor I had known before.

Therefore, during the three years, I had sent Stella, by each messenger that offered, the half of what money I had; and of the other half, saved what was possible against the day when I could send for her and my son to join me. It was a slow business, for I must keep my armor in repair—and armor needed repair after the battles of those days!—and three times I had to replace from my own purse horses that had been killed under me. Moreover, it was impossible that a woman, much less a child, should be with us on the march; and that meant living quarters in Venice, where rents were very great and the cost of food greater still.

It was not until I became captain, and entitled to one-third of all our gains, that I dared think the time had come, and then it was three years since I had heard word of Stella; she could not write, and the messengers I had sent—soldiers going homeward, or to new wars—returned not to give tidings by word of mouth. Perchance she was dead, and the child with her; perchance the moneys I had sent her had miscarried, and she believed me dead—or faithless. Once I had thought on the matter, the road northward seemed very long until I could despatch a messenger from my own troop to her; and the time seemed longer still until, having departed with a sum of money enough to escort Stella to me, he returned.

He returned alone. We were in camp near Venice, and it was night when he came to my tent—a real tent served the captain now; one taken from a duke in fair fight, in which a dozen big men could have stood erect; no poor affair of crossed lances. I was at the table, I remember, studying a map of the country where, it seemed, we were next to campaign, when the sentry announced the messenger's return.

Poor fellow, he came in timidly, hat (he had gone disguised) in one hand, and the bag of gold I had given him in the other, blushing even through his whiskers and the mud which spattered his face.

"Well?" I demanded.

"May it please the Captain," says the man, "the lady—er—"

"What? Dead?"

"No, may it please the Captain. She is very well, and so is your honor's son; a young devil, they tell me, walked at nine months, and now there's naught in the house safe from him but he will smash it. 'A had his face all tore to ribbons the day I saw him, from fighting of the cat."

"What is his name?"

"Antonio, may it please your honor."

Antonio! Named after her father, then; not after me. Before I knew it, I had bitten my lip so that I winced.

"Well?"

My messenger twisted his hat; then stepped forward and laid the bag of gold delicately on the table.

"My lady—er—" he said, "told me to tell your honor that she would not come."

It is from professed teachers, and with much pains, that we learn such petty tricks as writing and ciphering and sword-play; but I have ever found that the things truly important to be known, are imparted by things or by events rather than by persons; and in cavalry charges rather than in class-rooms.

Now, it was my throat-muscles taught me suddenly and forever, that no man knoweth his own feelings; for though meseemed 'twas little to me whether Stella came or not, these did suddenly contract till I was like to choke; it was as if my heart had flown up to be crushed between them; moreover, a darkness came before mine eyes, and the sounds of the camp outside fluxed to a roaring in mine ears. It was another voice than mine own that, from afar off, I heard demand of Varchi—

"Why not?"

"Does the Captain give me permission to speak?"

I nodded.

"Then she said that she found herself well enough as she was, and that she would not live, or have the boy grow up with, a common ruffian that wandered up and down the country in rags, murdering folk. Your honor's pardon. That was what the lady said."

I had strong envy to burst out laughing. Stella had been content enough when I had been in the guard. A ruffian indeed, and common, and a murderer! These were not the head and front of my offending now; nay, 'twas the wandering up and down the country, and the rags, that kept her in her father's house.

"Was that all?"

"Nay. With permission, I told her that your honor was not poor, and that she and the child were to inhabit Venice. But 'twas of no avail. The lady thinks us the kind of folk that are hanged by waysides, in which belief the signora her mother did woundily encourage her, saying that it would bring discredit on the family."

Now I burst into laughter outright. God wot I was not then what later I became; but after the two last campaigns, to think of an armorer's family disgraced by relation with Francesco Vitali was droll. Even the old dog before me crackled his face into a grin; so that little flakes of dried mud fell on my map. I brushed them off and put the bag of gold in my pocket.

"So!" said I. "It would appear our fame hath not yet won as far as Rometia."

"No, Captain."

" 'Tis a matter that must be remedied," says I, not thinking of what I said.

"The whole of Italy will hear of your honor ere long—" and there was that in his voice showed me he believed it; though at that moment, my heart a little low after his message, I did not.

"What was the boy like?"

"A big fellow, very like the Captain."

"Ah!" says I, and tried to picture him; but now I could not, knowing that I was not to see him in the flesh. In the expectation thereof, I had loosed my imaginations of years, and they would not be recaptured.

I became aware that old Varchi was looking at me with pity; which may not be between a soldier and his officer. 'Twas welcome, but such things destroy discipline.

"Dismissed!" I said therefore, rising; but as he saluted and turned to the door, I felt kindly to him.

"Hast thou a wife?" I asked.

"May it please the Captain—one."

"Children?"

"One also, your Honor."

"Where are they now?"

"They are in Siena, Captain."

I was about to ask him if his wife was faithful; but there was a gleam of happiness in his eyes as he spoke of his family that told me she was; or, if not, that he was unaware of it; the same thing, in this imperfect world.

Therefore I pulled the bag of gold forth again.

" 'Tis well," I told him. "Dost feel like another long ride—to see her?"

The tears came into his eyes, and he began to babble something about the boy; I flung the bag of gold into the hat.

"Then take this, and ten days' leave, and begone," says I.

He stared at the gold, and then at me, and burst forth into blessings; praying all sorts of saints to perform most menial offices for me after my death a thousand years thence.

"Dismissed!" I snapped at him; and, still protesting, he withdrew.

I heard him go rushing away, shouting his joy to his comrades while he waved the money about his shaggy head.

As for me, I studied the map with fixed eyes, and forced my mind to consider what munitions would be needed. For the future, meseemed, there would be naught else to do but that, and I would do it well; yet of a sudden, the occupation which erst had delighted me, had lost its savor. At the entry of Varchi there was before me a problem concerned with maneuvers about a certain marsh which, intersected by a river, guarded the city we were to attack; when he had gone, and my mind had revolted from the counting of deniers and harness-buckles, I returned to this problem and solved it; a solution which delights me when I think of it now. We had campaigned about there before, when we were fighting against the Sienese on the part of Venice; and by exact knowledge of the country, of the range of my guns, and of the rapidity with which my infantry could move, I confected a plan whereby the defenses of one gate must fall, not despite the protecting marsh, but because of it.

Like most men, I was—and am—accustomed to derive more pleasure from the realization of my own cleverness, than from the greatest benefits that cleverness may bring, and this plan would evidently bring me much profit both in ducats and in reputation; but now I sat in vain, staring at my scheme, and waiting for the thrill of delight at it. There it lay before me, perfect; yet, it was but a trick for the taking of a tower; the taking of the tower was but a means to gain money; and suddenly, I did not desire money; there was naught I could do with it. As for glory—what was that but a lever for the raising of prices, and the gaining of still more gold?

I rose from the table, and started to pace about the tent—up and down, to and fro, round and about; much as once I had seen the Duke Alessandro pace his cabinet and, I think, for much the same reason. Like him, and like a thousand other men who pace rich rooms restlessly in rich attire, I had taken up heavy tasks, to lay their fruition at the feet of a woman; he knowingly, I blindly, knowing not what urged me, babbling of honor and the salvation of my soul. Well, my honor was still to be gained, and my soul to be saved; but Stella was not to be pleased, nor my son filled with pride in his father; and so I paced, paced, paced my tent, biting my nails and wondering confusedly why my delights had thus turned to dust and ashes in my mouth. 'Twas a simple question, had I had the wits to answer it—which I had not, until thirty years later; the reward of my victories, my successes, my money-gaining, and my glories had been taken away; and all that remained me, was the burden of them.

"Midnight, Captain!" says Benedetto, my new lieutenant, from without; and I threw on a cloak, took place with him at the head of his file, and made the round of the camp. By this time, Benedetto had read the works of Messer Boccaccio as aforesaid, and had lost the sullenness that formerly remarked him. All during the patrol, he talked of tidings Varchi had brought from Rometia; of the progress of the duke's negotiations to unite the scattered counties under himself; of how the Pope regarded him, and the Venetians, and such matter; but I paid little attention, until the name of the Countess Anita came into his discourse.

"What of her?" I demanded; why, I know not, having seen her but twice; a premonition, belike.

"Why, as I say, this count of hers hath become a mere jest; 'twould seem he hath seizures, the which have been much infuriated by the countess' behavior. When they were wed, the duke her brother, for marriage-gift, sent her a company of men-at-arms—more, and greater devils, than Roberto hath; and with these for garrison, she possesses all the castle but one-quarter, in the which Roberto is permitted to live—alone. They meet at dinner in the great hall; and 'tis said that in his last seizure, outside the door of his wife's apartments, the count bit half his tongue away. Thou knowest the proverb: 'The tongue has no bones, but it can break a man's neck.' For the duke or Anita will do't fast enough, and save him the trouble—and take his castle and lands for their pains. Ho ho!"

Now we were come back to my tent.

"Aye, like enough," I said, trying to laugh. "Good night, Benedetto."

"Good night, Captain," says he, saluting while the file presented arms. "At what hour do we start for Mantua in the morning? And how many men for the escort?"

We were going to discuss the terms of payment for this Mantuan campaign, and earlier in the night, nothing had seemed to me more important or delightful than this journey of negotiation—my first as captain and mine own plenipotentiary—now it seemed a duty to be performed, nothing more.

"Fifty horse should be enough. We will leave at dawn."

"*Bene.* Are there further orders—as to armor, or the like?"

He meant, had I any new expedient for impressing the functionaries who would treat with us, and thus raising our price; I was fecund of such things as a rule.

"Nay," I told him. "As good a show as possible; that and their memory of us when we fought against them will suffice. Good night."

Benedetto looked at me queerly; but that was of no moment; I went into my tent—the candle had guttered and gone out—flung off my cloak and, not troubling to undress, lay down on my bed and pulled the wolf-skins over me. I was weary, wearier than I had been for years; and at the same time less inclined to sleep. First, I lay on my side, but my neck seemed twisted against the pillow, and I rolled to lie on my belly. Then I was suffocated, and I rolled on my back. Above me, there was an opening in the tent, for the admission of air; lying thus, I faced it, and saw a great star burning beyond the purple layers of the night.

Stella—

The thought of her gave me nor pleasure nor pain; I wondered how this should be, with my own wife; 'twas clear, if what the poets said were true—nay, if what most lovers acted were not hypocrisy—that I did not love her; yet once she had thrilled me, and made my heart swell; and, seeing her in my memory, she remained still most worthy to be loved; hers was the kind of beauty that doth not fade.

Then I remembered the shortened ell-measure; and the dresses she would have at the cost of our creditors; and her lust for the servant and the house of the guard-lieutenant at the price of a man's life—"to sustain her position." What position had she, in the name of God? My wife; had she been my mistress, she would not have coveted the envy of the neighbors; and so we should never have been forced apart.

'Twas marriage that had wrecked us—that accursed stretching of love between two people, to include envy, pride and malice, and to be ordered by other people;

dead, living, or to be born. Stella and I had not thought of marriage; 'twas her mother had done that; her mother and that cat-faced aunt; because Stella had wished to give me money. Yet old woman Olivieri was forever cackling about love, the only true reason to wed. What in the name of God had money to do with love—or dresses either, or lieutenant's houses?

Yet 'twas such things that were of the first importance in marriage. 'Twas such things that had killed our love—

Now I rolled on my face again, and lay there sweating; I could not free my mind of Stella, though between the vision of her and my imagination rose processions of folk. Signora Olivieri and her sister at their head; then files of people I had seen in the streets of Rometia, of Siena, of Venice, of Mantua, of Florence—of all the world; women having found in marriage more children than their love would encompass, and therefore furious lest young folk should love at all; other women, their beauty and happiness faded in the airless room of matrimony, and so eager that all beauty and happiness should forthwith be imprisoned therein; smug liars of old men, wise in the ways of infidelity, exhorting the young to hold sacred the bond, and enjoying by default the birthright of fettered youth; young men—myself among them—carrying the burdens of their strength, without its recompense; Church and State smiling on the horrid scene; blessing it, and studying continually how to turn it still more to their profit. . . .

By my tent-door, the sentry's pike clanged against his armor; I heard his mail jingle as he shifted his position; and of a sudden I saw myself marching guard on the city walls of Rometia, at night, looking down, to my right, upon the glint of the moat in the moonlight; on the other side, at the smoking chimneys, fragrant with wood smoke, of the red-roofed houses huddled against the wall.

This was the third watch, and the town was asleep, its streets deserted, and its windows dark—save for one, meseemed, which gleamed ruddily at the level of the sentry-walk itself. I went toward it; and lo! 'twas not a window, but a door: a little low door whose posts were bulging beams of oak and whose sill was a great stone, scrubbed white as snow; moreover there was a little bridge with crooked hand-rails of wood leading to it from the wall.

This bridge I crossed. Flowers entwined it, and the air was sweet with them; and I knocked at the door that stood ajar. There was no answer; I knocked again, and my heart began to beat as if it would suffocate me; yet 'twas pleasant. Still there was no answer; so, leaning my halberd against the wall, I pushed open the door and entered.

'Twas a door on top of a house, surely; a strange thing, but here were steps leading downward—half a dozen of them, curiously curving; and at their foot was such a room as lies warm under the tiles, filled with strange old stuffs, and outworn dresses of thick silks; and chairs on which great-grandfathers have sat; and dark pictures of folk long gone into the darkness.

A lamp burned bright on the table; a log crackled on the hearth and a cat was stretched out before it, licking one paw; but of human habitant I saw no trace until, turning suddenly, I found standing behind me a little girl. Perhaps she had thirteen years; she was dressed in dark cloth, with a scarlet girdle, and she had been standing there silent, looking at me; when I turned, she looked at me still, smiling gravely; and I smiled at her. Also, the strangely joyous thundering of my heart, which I had felt at the little door, began again.

"What is your name?" I asked her.

"Maria," said she.

I could not take my eyes from hers.

"It is a saint's name," she said, in a low voice that trembled.

"It was my mother's name."

Then I felt a great hand on my shoulder, striving to thrust me out of the room; and I swung about, desperately resolved that I would not go; and another hand seized me, and I fought; until the voice that was crying, "Captain! Captain!" struck my ears as Benedetto's; and my eyes opened; and the warm light of the attic room changed to the cold gray mist of dawn; and I found myself sitting shivering upright in bed, gripping my lieutenant's wrists while the face of the sentry, grinning, peered in past the flap on the tent.

"Art awake now?"

"Aye." And Benedetto loosed me. He wiped his brow.

"I thought thou'd have strangled me, Captain. Whew! 'Tis dawn, and the men are eating."

"Good. I will come."

He saluted and left, looking somewhat offended that I said naught, but sat there smiling; he thought, doubtless, at my near strangling of him as I awoke; but really, it was with pleasure at my dream. I thought of it, in every detail, as I dressed and put on my armor; the picture of the room, with its lamp-light and its fire and its cat and the little girl, was before mine eyes as I ate the strong soup of onion and cheese from my iron pot; and it was over this same that I was smiling so happily when we rode toward our rendezvous six hours later.

Once more I looked forward to outwitting the Mantuan functionaries in the matter of pay; the plan for the taking of the marsh-gate so dully dreary last night now seemed delectable; my heart was high again.

ANITA

CHAPTER XII

OF RICARDO SALVIATI

THE name of the town to be taken was Savello; and, after I had joyously screwed up the Mantuans to the highest price my reputation would warrant, we took it; a miserable little place, but beyond example hard-working, and so placed that heretofore it had been able to barter its commerce between Mantua and Siena, making each in turn outbid the other, and so prospering exceedingly.

How I scorned it, though its capture had added so brightly to my reputation!

And how little did I think that those very qualities of money-grubbing and dishonesty which, visible in the port of its inhabitants as we paraded through the city, did so disgust me, were to decide the course of my life, five years thence!

They were five lean years for *condottieri*, those following that affair. All Italy seemed to have beaten swords into—well, into ink-stands and poison-bottles; and had it not been that many free bands, being commanded by foreigners, went to try their fortune in other and more fortunate countries, I know not what might have become of us. Of the great companies there remained but mine own and that of Matteo Scarlatti; and I have since learned that he was as hard-pressed as I, when of a sudden the war-famine was relieved. He was sent for into Rometia, where the duke had business toward; and I was summoned by the Sienese, for the reduction of this same town I had taken for the Mantuans; Savello, of the sidewise-moving merchants, the shifty-eyed council, and the hat-handed populace; of the ducat-stuffed hose, and of the starved fortifications. I do now forget what trader's agreement with Siena these folk had broken since the wane of Mantuan power over the city. It was, belike, that, having promised the Sienese their commerce if these would work against the Mantuans in the markets—merchants fight together, it seems, by the giving or withholding of bits of paper—the Savellans, freed, had found they could trade to more advantage with other than their deliverers.

And so, as I have seen happen time and time again, the paper war was to be decided by one of steel; the Sienese calling us in, not to cut their ducats out of the Savellans' gizzards; nay, nay; to establish the integrity of treaties; and the Savellans arming their walls, not to guard their ill-gotten gains, but to defend their liberty of choice, and to vindicate the sacred freedom of commerce.

How I laughed at their manifestos! Aye, aye; for I had thought much since Stella had forsaken me; and my soul had hardened; so that, meseemed, it was no longer in the power of the stupidities, hypocrisies, and the sins of humanity to make me weep or rage. It was my conceit (on my way north to both tears and fury, alack!) that, since I was 'ware of the world; since I expected naught but to be miscomprehended, lied to and betrayed, and was ready to lie and betray like my fellows, laughter would be my portion henceforth.

Well. . . .

Since that campaign which had been my first, the Sienese were subject to the control of Venice in all such matters as the making of war or treaties; therefore why this meeting to barter for my services was holden in the palace of a Venetian, one Ricardo Salviati. He was a noble, a great merchant to boot, and a man of consideration in the government—though what was his office in the Republic, I can not at this distance recall. 'Twas he, I perceived on entering the audience room, that was to decide the matter at issue. For one thing, he sat at the center of the long table facing me, with the Sienese delegates to right and left of him; for another thing, his chair was higher than theirs; and thirdly, his hook nose, his fierce old eyes, his white hair and his black velvet cap jutted out of the gathering as an eagle's head from a nest of doves.

"Good day, sirs," says I, as I entered, followed by Benedetto and two men, and took the chair that had been placed for me.

The Sienese all returned my greeting in a smiling mutter designed to keep my price down; but old Salviati did not reply. A year before, this would not have seemed strange; now, at his silence, I was woundily minded to arise and get thence in dudgeon; but of a sudden I perceived that, in his high seat, the master of the council was making a sign; to which his silence had but served to draw my attention. Very slightly, so little as not to be perceived by the negotiators at his sides, he was shaking his venerable head at me, in the fashion of "Nay!"

As soon as he saw that I had observed this, he ceased; looked down at a paper before him, and opened the business of the day; leaving me to consider the proposals tendered with one-half of my mind, while the other puzzled over the problem of that head-shake. Nay. But nay—what?

He finished his statement of the case, and one of the Sienese burst forthwith into speech.

"It should be an easy task," says this one, eagerly. "The defenses of the city are out of date; the inhabitants are discontented—"

"I suppose the marsh and the river are out of date also?" I interrupted him. "Or are they discontented? 'Tis of no use to put a false case to me, my masters. I have campaigned about there."

I thought old Salviati smiled at this, and regarded me favorably. As for the eager delegate, he sank back in his chair confused.

"Well?" I asked, looking from him to another Sienese.

"Well," says he reluctantly, "the case stands thus; to be sure the marsh and the river are there; if they were not, sure we could deal with this town with what little force our last war left us, instead of calling in the great Francesco Vitali at such a price as—as—a thousand crowns."

This, of course, was but a bargaining sum; but, watching Salviati, I saw him begin to shake his head again.

"You might double that amount, and then double it again," I replied, "and still not have called in the great Francesco Vitali aforesaid. So do not mislead yourselves, signore, I beseech you."

Again I seemed to see Salviati smile.

"Until we shall have taken this city," says a mean-looking fellow at the far left of the board, "we are very poor; our taxes to Venice are crushing heavy."

"The which does not stop the appetites of my horses or my men," I reminded him, "nor enable my guns to shoot without powder. I am filled with regret for your condition, signore, but the facts are the facts, as we have seen in the case of the marsh and the river."

"Four thousand crowns," says the delegate who had mentioned one thousand the minute past. "And the siege will not take a week."

Now, by virtue of the plan I had conceived when the Mantuan campaign was in question, three or four days would suffice; but without that plan there would have been naught to be come at with the city under a month or even two months, with a great deal of fighting for good measure; and it was with this knowledge that the delegate was speaking of a week.

I showed him his error.

"Then how much, in the name of God, dost thou demand?" he cried loudly.

"The offers have been coming from you," I said gently.

"It is the province of the seller to name the price!"

"Quite so; but I am no seller, signor. I have come hither, on the contrary, at great pains, because I was told you were eager to buy. If I have been misinformed—"

I half rose, and the poor wretch flew into a panic.

"Nay—nay," says he. "But—in short—accord us one moment, I pray you, while I consult with my colleagues."

"I pray you in turn," I said, seating myself, "that the result of the consultation may be final; I am pressed for time."

While they put their heads together, I examined the face of old Salviati. He was taking no part in the discussion; he had no need, for of course the limit of payment which Venice would permit had long since been decided; and all this whispering was but to decide whether I should be offered this sum forthwith, or whether it should be attempted to bargain further. I had a suspicion, from the rise and fall of the whispers, that the next offer would be their greatest, or near enough; but—old Salviati was shaking his head again.

The delegates separated.

"We have decided," says the chief of them, clearing his throat, "to offer you ten—thousand—crowns."

It was enough; under the circumstances, it would even be a handsome profit; but the white head with the velvet cap shook again, and the Venetians, at that time, were such customers as no captain would dare to offend.

"I have decided not to accept the sum."

And I rose again.

"Twelve thousand!"

"Signore, you have my profound regrets; both for your wasted time, and for mine."

"Fifteen!"

Now, by God's body, that was a fine price; very fine; my mouth watered for it, and I scarce dare look at Salviati, for fear that beard should be moving once more in the gesture of negation. But look at him I did; and the beard was so moving; and forthwith, I declined the amount. And this was their last effort; as I bowed to them, and reached for my cap in the hands of Benedetto, the spokesman sank back in his chair despairing.

"I would not have you think me rapacious, my masters," I lied with a lively delight, "but in these days, with wars hither and yon and great demand for fighting in all styles, the price of gunpowder and man-flesh hath become so high, that—"

Here old Salviati arose, and interrupted me. He addressed the delegates.

"My friends," says he, in a thin voice, "this is great pity; none knoweth better than I how your city would benefit by this affair; none knows better what sacrifices ye have made to—in short—to bring the matter so far. Perchance if I were to consult with the captain a little in private—"

"Oh, willingly, willingly!" cries the spokesman, bolting out of his chair as if he would have left us private by flinging himself into the canal.

"I have, meseems, the case well in mind," adds Salviati, looking down at the paper. "H'm. The amounts of taxation to be raised—h'm. Government to be—h'm—I would have your escort also withdraw, Captain."

"Dismissed," says I to Benedetto, handing him my cap again—poor fellow, he was in an agony to see this rich offer refused; not daring to speak, he winked, and writhed his mouth, and contorted his face at me in protest until his features must have ached.

Then I was left alone with Messer Ricardo, who immediately beckoned me close to the table.

"Thou hast done very well," he told me in a low voice, tossing the Sienese paper to one side as if it were of no interest at all. "And now thou hast done so, Captain, I will tell thee that there is to be no war of the kind these folk desire. When 'twas first broached, we thought well enough; but since then, divers of us—myself among them—have gathered great interests of merchandise in the very city they would attack, which any sort of assault would prejudice. It would be well for thee to speak of the matter to what other free captains thou may encounter. I speak of the matter to thee, rather than to another, because it would seem that thou and Matteo Scarlatti are become the leaders of the profession here northerly."

"Matteo Scarlatti is weak in cavalry," I remarked.

"But his tongue and his desire for gold are as strong as thine," replied the old Venetian, smiling, "wherefore I have despatched a courier to him, with the same injunctions I have laid on thee."

This was a great relief—that Scarlatti should not have the work I had been forced to refuse; but, no matter, the loss to me remained; and of set purpose, I let regret for it show clearly in my face. The which Ricardo saw, and smiled again.

"No need to ask for compensation," says he, "it is ready prepared for thee—though not in the form of money to be handed across this table. Were that the case, how much wouldst thou expect—considering that thou hast no powder to buy, no men to lose, and that in refusing these Sienese, thou hast obliged the Republic of Venice?"

"Four thousand crowns."

"It is not unreasonable," says Ricardo, running his fingers through his beard. "I rejoice to see thee reasonable. H'm. For this convinces me that thou'lt see the reason of what I am about to propose in lieu of compensation direct— It was indeed thou that wast banished from Rometia?"

He shot the question at me suddenly, so that I started in my seat.

"If not banished," old Salviati corrected himself, "then at least forced to seek safety outside the duchy's boundaries, in such sort that—it would be inadvisable for thee to return?"

"Aye."

"H'm," says he, "and 'tis a pity; for there are to be many little wars and sieges and suchlike under way in that duchy ere long, when my good cousin doth begin to pull upon the cord with which he hath enclosed the various counties; and at present it would appear that Matteo Scarlatti will have the benefit of them all. A great pity."

Since he was watching me like a hawk, I gave no sign of the inward fury of jealousy that was consuming me. Instead, I appeared to stifle a yawn.

"It is furthermore a pity," continued Ricardo, "that when the good duke hath gone to the trouble, with one noble, of marrying him to his sister, instead of taking his lands by force or—er—strategy, that the said noble should be threatening armed violence, at a time when the duke hath his hands full without."

"The Count Roberto?" says I carelessly.

"The same. Having offered unnamed insults to the Countess Anita, he was put forth from his castle—"

"Put forth?" I gasped.

"Even so. And instead of submitting the matter to the Duke Alessandro, as to his overlord, and demanding justice on the merits of the case, lo! he proclaims himself his own liege and answerable to none, and prepares to raise an army. As is well known, he is afflicted; doubtless, his mind hath become unhinged."

It was my advice that, on the contrary, the Count Roberto showed himself in the soundest reason; a wise move it would have been surely, to appeal to the duke against the action of the duke's own sister, inspired by the duke himself! What he would have gained from that would have been a dungeon or a poisoned salad, for having asked admission to his wife's apartments, or some such thing.

"Nevertheless," says Salviati mildly, "it is not to be permitted that, mad or in his wits, he should besiege the Countess Anita, who, with half a dozen guards, doth hold the castle for its liege-lord; and Alessandro hath no troops that he can spare to its defense. I am therefore empowered to offer thee five thousand crowns, the duke's pardon, and his assurance of employment in his service with all thy men, for the defense of the castle in question against the Count Roberto. H'm."

I considered this.

"How many men may the count raise?" I asked.

"A very few. Who shall join him, when it is known he is to fight against the duke, and that his Highness will hang all prisoners? Besides, the count hath lost half his tongue—and all his worship."

That last I could well believe.

"Then who is to be in command of the place," I asked. "Her Ladyship the Countess—or myself?"

"Of a certainty, thyself."

Still I hesitated.

"Well?"

"Nobles are kittle cattle to order about," I said, "and apt to be jealous of their authority in matters military, however ill equipped."

Salviati scowled.

"I thought thou wert of noble blood thyself."

"It's a delusion I foster; but to return to the matter, signor—should I have authority to—"

"Shut the wench up in a room if she interfered with thee? Yes. I am procurator for the duke in Venice, and I will give thee a warrant under his seal. Now—we have discussed this enow; thou art aware, or should be, that thou hast everything to gain by accepting, and everything to lose by refusing this task; the duke's favor, and the favor of Venice. Great rewards, I think, for withstanding a half-hearted siege in a castle they call "The Impregnable." Yes, or no?"

"Yes," says I, rising.

"'Tis well. The money will be ready for thee by noon."

"And when am I to start?"

"This very day! And make speed, my friend, make speed!"

CHAPTER XIII

OF A BATTLE

IT WAS four days, nevertheless, before we crossed that border of Rometia nearest to the Count Roberto's castle; for this reason, that cavalry is of no use save to eat its head off when the question is of defending a place from within; I had therefore to dismount my men, arrange for the keeping of their horses while we should be absent and to march them to the scene of our labors as an infantry column. It had been Pietro Uccello's thought (though 'tis generally attributed to me) that each cavalryman should also be drilled dismounted, and each infantryman compelled to learn to ride, while both arms should be taught to use our cannon; and this plan had been most strictly carried out.

I was right glad of it on this occasion; for signs were not lacking, ere we reached our destination, that old Ricardo Salviati had understated the case in favor of Count Roberto. Item: there was a strange lack of men fit to bear arms along our route; we gained not a single recruit on all that march; item: the shopkeepers in small towns grinned at us what time we bought supplies; item: a village idiot on the border did tell us in so many words that the count was not without friends.

He stopped us, and mopped and mowed, and demanded to know if we were more pretty soldiers on our way to aid Roberto; and when I said we were (reflecting that we might thus gain news, and could in no case lose anything)—he held up his five fingers and said that number of detachments had passed before us.

"As many as we are?" asked Benedetto, at my side.

"Oh, more, more!" laughs the idiot, dancing away down the road. "And prettier, prettier!"

"Mad," says Benedetto, looking at me sidewise.

"Doubtless," says I; and we moved on again. Nevertheless, we doubled the strength of our advance-guard, and threw out extra scouting parties on the wings—these were horse, numbering fifty, which I had brought for use in sorties from the castle.

"Where should he gather such forces?" asked Benedetto uneasily, as we moved cautiously along the last league toward the castle.

I had been thinking over this, during the night, and had, as it turned out, lit on the right answer.

"The Duke Alessandro hath been scheming so long, and dispossessing so many small nobles," says I, "that they, and such dependants as have kept to them, should make a nice little force by this time; 'tis possible that they are taking Roberto's cause for an excuse, and rallying together for a last blow at his Highness while he is busy elsewhere."

"They will have no discipline."

"Let us thank God for it," says I; "and also let us hope that this castle is indeed impregnable, and well stocked with provisions, or we shall earn our money hard."

"—— me if I see why thou refused the offer of the Sienese," grumbled Benedetto.

"Then fall back two lengths, and think over the problem," says I irritably. "In any case, question me no more; this is not thy province."

"I—"

"One more word; and thou'rt sergeant!"

So he fell back; but not for long. This conversation was at our entry into the dense wood which stretches, curving, about the castle at a distance of the third of a league from the walls; and ere we were half-way through it, back came flying half the advance-guard to say there was a strong force investing the place; drawn up in the open between the wood and the castle-hill.

"How many? Horse or foot? Have they guns?"

"Are they ware of us?" demands Benedetto, having retaken his place at my side.

"They are as many as we, sirs," says the spokesman for the advance-party. "Half horse and half foot, I should say, but no guns. They are drawn up in battle order, out of range of the castle."

"Then perchance they are in range of us," I thought; and ordered forward the guns, commanding them to take place under cover of the wood, but not to fire until the word. Then, with Benedetto, I rode forward to observe the state of affairs with mine own eyes.

It was ill enough. At a glance I perceived that the castle on its bare rock, and with its three several enceintes was well enough; but at a glance also it was visible that winning to it would be no mere matter of saying "Forward!" First, the scout had erred concerning the number of cavalry; seven hundred there must have been, and a good five hundred foot; and very neatly placed for the purpose they had in mind—infantry in the center, and horse at the wings, to fly forward and break up the attack before it should reach the foot. I was comforted, however, by observing that, though they knew of our approach, the enemy sent forward no party to deliver a time-attack, and so confuse us at the beginning; I judged that this failure was due to lack of discipline —that the commanders, whoever they might be, could trust their men to hold together under attack, but that the commands were too mixed for outflung maneuver.

I considered the scene for some time; then, retiring the advance-guard and calling in the scouts, I returned to where the column waited, and prepared to act. The guns meantime had taken their position under the fringe of the trees; the cavalry I divided into two squadrons, one under Benedetto, the other under my oldest sergeant, and I sent them to the left and right of the enemy's position, to conceal themselves as the guns were concealed, and at the proper time to deliver charges on the flanks.

"But they will eat us!" says Benedetto.

"Aye—with blood sauce," and I hit him across the bridge of the nose with my steel gauntlet. "Obey orders, thou, or I'll start the slaughter by hanging thee!"

"They are three or four hundred on a flank, to our twenty-five," says he doggedly, letting the blood run down his breastplate as it would.

"Ah, but I am here. In token whereof, this!" and I smote him with the gauntlet again. "Now begone, ere I lose patience."

"But—when are we to move? Who will give us the order?" asks the sergeant, saluting twice to make sure.

"When their cavalry breaks ground and begins to move," I told him. "Let them have the bombs—"

I remembered here that unaware that our entry would be opposed, and counting on great store of powder in the castle, I had ordered the leaving of the bombs behind.

"Ah, *diavolo!* No matter; the fame of our trick should be here by now; let us hope so. Each man take a stone the size of his fist, and throw it as if it were a bomb. Is that understood?"

"Aye, Captain," says the sergeant, thinking me mad.

"Then take positions. Benedetto, order the foot to advance to the end of the wood and halt."

While this was being done, I rode up to the gunners, and asked their sergeant if it would be possible to reach the enemy; he was a wizard with gunpowder, that man; he said it would perhaps be possible, at the risk of bursting the cannon.

"A bouncing shot, well understood, Captain," says he.

"Aye. Fire the first now."

He put in a double charge, cocked the piece so that it seemed like to shoot a hole in heaven, and let fly; I watched the ball rise (strange, how one can see the things in flight, either from behind or in front, but it is better to be behind)—I watched it rise, I say, watched it begin to fall; and then lost sight of it until, of a sudden there was a stir, like the splash of a stone in a pool, amid one company of enemy foot. Like the rings from such a splash, moreover, I perceived movement spreading to right and left and forward in the ranks.

"Give them another!"

He did; a better than the first, though it dropped short and advanced the rest of its journey rolling and hopping along the ground. It could easily be seen by those to whom it was commended, and it maleased them more than the sudden shock of the first. The front rank split, surged backward, and was already half on the run when the ball overtook its particular man and smashed his spine in; nevertheless, I saw that, so far, the officers had their men in hand; the movement was checked and the ranks stood firm.

"Continue till they break," says I, "and, then bring the pieces after us into the castle. Come at the rear of the column."

"Aye, Captain."

And all went most wonderfully as I had planned. My column of infantry, be it understood, was facing the center of their position, on which the balls of my guns were playing steadily, with dropping shots and ricochets; my two paltry detachments of cavalry were at their wings, unknown; and when, to avoid panic, the enemy tried to retire beyond cannon-range, the whole force moved at once. An undisciplined force, or one whose command is various, doth move awkwardly, and with confusion, especially if it be composed of two arms; the horse move too fast for the foot, and the foot too slow for the horse.

They moved—they churned rather, and I perceived mounted men spurring about their flanks, trying to push them into order; one of these nobles was taken off his horse and flung into the midst of the mass by the last ball from my guns; he seemed all legs and arms, I remember, as he flew through the air.

At this very moment Benedetto and the sergeant came forth from their flanking retreats, endeavoring to make up by speed and shock what they lacked in force; and yelling as they advanced (an old trick) to imaginary cohorts behind them, not to follow them too close.

And at the same time I gave the word and loosed the column of infantry. It advanced at the run, changing its formation as it left the narrow roadway into that of column of companies, all directed at the enemy's center; and to help matters further, the guns of the castle walls began to fire on the chance that the retreat had brought the besiegers within range.

I am not aware that they did damage, even with rolling balls; but their boom and roar increased the terror that was gaining foothold in the opposed ranks, just as did the harmless stones which my cavalry hurled with fearsome cries, just before the shock. It may be said that these stones half gained the day; for on the left flank the enemy horse panicked at the sight of them, split, and thus opened a passage where through Benedetto and his twenty-five men crashed full into the side of a struggling infantry company, hurling it over in confusion against neighboring formation.

Before the center had recovered from this blow, the speediest company of my infantry was among them; not fighting so much as boring steadily through the press, toward the castle gate. Hot on the heels of this company came another; and another, and another; and I observed that when the first had passed through, and gained the far side of the enemy lines, the fight did not follow it; on the contrary; it seemed more inclined to draw away to left and right of the following companies, and to leave them clear passage. Four companies thus passed through; then the fifth, sixth and seventh, instead of following them, spread under my orders and did vigorously attack the wavering besiegers; in such sort that, after a half-hearted struggle these yelled for aid to their cavalry; and, finding it in no case to assist, broke into frank rout; running hither and yon—and most under the hoofs of the cavalry aforesaid, which was trying to reform and charge.

It was a pleasant affair, in fine; even down to the enemy's last attack, after my whole force had passed, and was almost to the castle's open gate. I suppose their commanders, being inexperienced—unprofessional, I would say—took the defeat as an insult to their nobility or the like; in such fashion as to forget caution; or it may have been that the chance to charge us from the rear, and perhaps gain the gate before it could be dropped, was so tempting as to blind them. Be that as it may, their cavalry charged us in close order, a bare bowshot from the castle walls; and, as was natural, received in full flight a ball from every gun that side of the ramparts.

That was the first—and indeed the only time—ever I saw a detachment stand upon its head.

The front rank, smitten across its whole front, stopped so suddenly that it seemed to be blown even backward; the second rank piled upon it, and the third tried, as it were, to leap the whole, and failed. Then came the fourth line, crashed into the toppling structure of horses and men, and rolled the whole mass over.

We had entered the castle, horse, foot and guns, and the drawbridge was raised and the portcullis lowered, before that writhing inferno had resolved itself; and as we stood in the great courtyard we heard the roar of another fire from the walls, mincing the poor struggling wretches still finer as they rose.

AH, me! Ah, me!

Still, piteous as it seems to me now, 'twas my trade at that time; and although the victory was due more to mine adversaries' fault than to my virtues, right well did I consider I had acquit myself in this first experience of siege warfare. We were in the castle, having lost no more than forty men killed (mostly infantry), and some fifty wounded; whereas the loss to the besiegers must have been two or three hundred out of action.

All that disquieted me was that, in the press of the battle, I had not seen Count Roberto; doubtless this meant that he was away, raising more aid still; and if such were the case, and more troops arrived, sorties would be out of the question; 'twould be a matter of sitting still in the castle, awaiting the time when Alessandro should have force free wherewith to raise the siege.

It was a much graver matter than had been represented to me; if we were to be bottled up here for months, old Scarlatti would gain all the employment that offered; and I had no great trust in the gratitude of Salviati, once his business was done. My temper, notwithstanding the victory, was evil as I saw to the accommodation of my men, set guards, and sent the steward to ask an interview with the Countess Anita.

The cannon-fire had given her a headache, it appeared; she excused herself until supper; and, in the meantime, I set about preparations for the siege.

Naturally, the first duty in order was a general inspection of the stronghold, its disposition for defense, and its provisions for the maintenance of its defenders. Of these, the first were excellent, and the second little short of dismaying. Since the castle was built upon a rock, whereof one face was sheer, without foothold, and another so steep as to be defensible by a dozen men against an army, my forces were sufficient to man the outer enceinte thoroughly, leaving moreover enough to garrison the inner citadel, and fill the towers that protected the angles of approach to the enceinte. Of powder and shot, likewise of crossbows and their bolts, even of longbows and their arrows, there was great store; it was when I came to the food magazines that my heart sank. Either from precaution or carelessness, the Count Roberto had failed to keep his castle in state to withstand a siege; the stores which should (according to one of the countess' guard that came with us as guide) have been enough for fifteen hundred men's sustenance during a month, were so depleted that I doubted whether we could live on them for a fortnight.

"There are the horses," says Benedetto feebly, catching my eye as it rolled.

"Fifty horses to be paid for out of five thousand crowns," says I, "will leave us a great wealth—and the men to be paid. Benedetto, do thou go forthwith to the walls and attend to the setting of the guard and the disposition of the armament. I will join thee anon. As for thee, soldier, go instanter to the countess, and say I must have audience, headache or no headache."

"I—I dare not," says the man.

"Dost thou believe me a better person to beard than the lady?"

Seemingly, he was spared this mistake; for he departed suddenly, and I followed at his heels; having long since learned the folly of permitting nobles to refuse by word alone. To say no is very easy; to keep a determined man out of the presence by force is a little more difficult. Nor had I scruple as to this assertion of the force at my command against a woman; I had long since learned, likewise, that there is no difference of sex between nobles, male and female, what time they are dealing with the commonalty; they are nobles simply. From what I remembered of the countess, that night in the duke's cabinet; from what I had heard of her since; and above all, from inspection of the terror of this soldier before me, I was inclined to believe her peculiarly addict to the ways of nobility, and accordingly it seemed well to put my authority into practise without delay. Ah, what a changed world this would be if all could know what I had learned even at that time; namely, how bankrupt are most princes, not only of the wealth on whose reputation they live in luxury, but of those qualities for which they were formerly respected, and for which they remain respected because folk have more habits than brains!

The soldier came forth from a doorway, to where I awaited him in the corridor; and his face was as white as wool.

To be Continued

Hugh Pendexter's

NEW *story of Midwestern Pioneers*

RED STRIPES

FROM the moment he was made captive near the station on the Big Sandy, the Virginian began looking for an opportunity to escape. He was ferociously angry at himself for venturing outside the station against the advice of the small garrison. Recently arrived from Richmond, he had presumed to know more about red men than did the border people. He had insisted the Indians had abandoned the siege after losing three warriors and having two wounded. And within easy gunshot of the stockade he had been jumped by the Wyandots and hustled away. His captors were from the Lower Sandusky village. Throughout the journey down the Sandy and up the Ohio to the Guyandotte Crossing he had nursed his resentment against the Indians and himself. In the back of his mind was the hope he would find an opportunity to break clear before crossing to the Indian shore. But the Guyandotte was reached and the Ohio was crossed without a minute of carelessness on the part of the raiders. At night the Virginian slept as best he could with a rawhide thong around his waist, from which lines were attached to the waist of a warrior on each side. In addition to this precaution his feet and hands were tied. When canoes were abandoned for forest travel his hands were tied at his back and he was led along by a length of rawhide around his neck. He fell and bruised himself. He was hauled through bushes and was scratched by briers from head to waist. At times the cord tightened, and he was all but strangled.

The leader of the Wyandots was a short, thick-set man. Unlike his followers he wore no paint on his face and his countenance was agreeable and very intelligent. His only attempt at adornment was the red stripe following the backbone from the nape of his neck to his waist. All of his men were similarly painted and in addition were grotesque and frightful because of the patterns masking their faces. The raid had been a failure, and the warriors were in an evil mood. The chief realized that his popularity as a leader would quickly wane did he encounter one more defeat, yet he treated the prisoner kindly once a camp was made. In person he saw to it that the Virginian had

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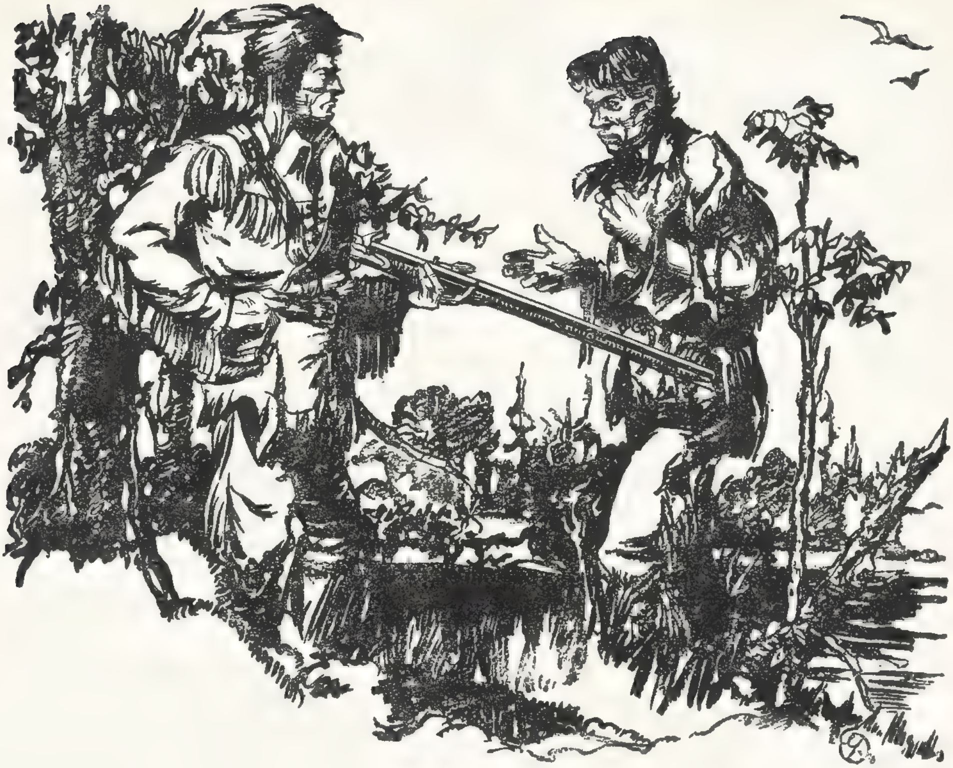


water and meat. This consideration led the prisoner to believe that at the worst he would be held in some red village until he could be ransomed.

After he reached the Indian shore several ambitious young men remained behind and did not rejoin the band until the evening of the second day. They brought in two scalps and one prisoner. The chief rejoiced greatly. He would be credited with victory by a slight margin. The horrid proofs of the tragedy were danced with much enthusiasm that evening.

When he found himself by the prisoner the Virginian asked for details.

"We was took by surprize while setting traps for beaver and otter," the man explained in a monotonous voice. "I'm Abner Bryant. There was the three of us, Ben an' Tom Durgin an' me. Ben 'lowed he could make a firehole in a clump of willers that no Injun could see. Well, both the Durgins are dead."

He was a thin, dried-out wisp of a man whose head was thinly frosted by a round number of years. He spoke without emotion, as one who is weary. His acceptance of his capture and the death of his friends smacked of fatalism. The incident was closed and did not interest him. However, he was curious enough to inquire—

"Who might you be?"

"Harry Knight. A fool. Knew more'n my elders at the station on the Big Sandy," was the bitter reply. "We got three of them. Then I had to go outside the stockade to prove I knew it all and that the Injuns had gone. Now I s'pose I've got to put in a winter in some filthy village."

Bryant eyed him in mild surprize and asked—

"Know their lingo?"

Knight shook his head impatiently.

"No sense to their jabber. The leader treats me well. I think he likes me."

Bryant pursed his thin lips and glanced appraisingly at the well-knit figure of the younger man and decided.

"You oughter last three days. They'll manage to keep you alive for two, anyway."

"Keep me alive?" repeated Knight. "But I ain't sick. Bruised and scratched—"

Bryant broke in:

"Young man, you'n me will be painted

black once we git to the Lower Sandusky village. Better they treat us now, the worse they'll treat us when we make the village. I won't need much killing. But you're younger an' stronger. You'll be stubborn an' die hard. I'm nigh to eighty. Forty-odd year ago they'd had a rare time with me. My pride would a held me up. Now they won't git much fun out of my dying."

"Merciful heavens!" hoarsely whispered Knight, and he turned to stare at the leaping, gesticulating figures circling the scalp poles.

The older man casually explained:

"Of course I tried to git killed along with Ben an' Tom. Didn't have no luck. Chief there is Cap'n Jimmy, his white name. Red name's Little Beaver. If you see the slimmest chance for ducking out, grab it. Don't make over your back track. Strike west an' lose yourself. If you live to hit the Scioto, travel southwest to the Ohio and follow it down to Massie's Station.* As a fact you'll prob'ly be overhauled mighty sharp an' sudden. But that's all right if they don't take you alive. That's the prime p'int I always tried to ding into our settlers. Never be took alive. Now see me! Trussed up like this! 'Low I'll raise the chief's dander. Sometimes you can git them mad enough to swing an ax and cheat themselves out of the torture."

He threw back his head and in the Huron dialect loudly called out:

"Ho! Ho! They say a chief runs back whipped from a red path. They say he throws away his warriors like a foolish man. Has a wolf stepped over his gun and spoiled his medicine? His young men break away and bring two scalps. Where are the scalps Little Beaver has taken?"

The chief stared at him ferociously. A man near-by reached forward and struck him across the mouth.

Bryant philosophically remarked:

"Well, it didn't work that time. Mebbe next time."

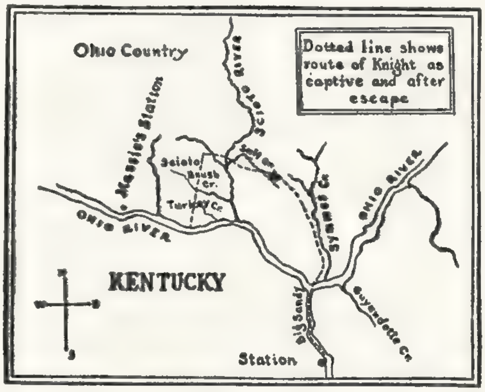
A man brought water in a kettle and held it up for Knight to drink, but gave the old man none. The latter mused:

"Still treating you like a brother. But wait."

"I'll not wait. I'll try to escape the first time my hands and feet are untied," muttered the Virginian.

Because of their two wounded men and the loot taken from two cabins on the Sandy the band covered not more than a dozen miles a day. During the three days they traveled up Symmes creek Bryant was loaded with plunder while Knight was compelled to carry nothing. He gladly would have shouldered the old man's burden, but the later explained:

"Best this way. If you git a glimmer of a chance to scoot you'll need all your strength. I couldn't make a race of it if I had half a mile start. I've lived my years an' I've sent a sizable number of them on ahead of me." He paused and lifted his head the better to watch two men busy with something on the opposite side of the small fire. Then he was whispering, "They're fixing black paint."



"Black paint!" gasped Knight. "You said I'd be painted black."

"Not yet. They'll keep you to show at the village. Got to make some showing to offset the men he's lost. The women folks would be mad if a prisoner wasn't fetched in. Here they come. Keep a bold face."

Two men briskly advanced bearing a bowl taken from some settler's cabin. This was filled with a rough paste made from charcoal and water. The other Wyandots gathered around to witness the ceremony. A man released Bryant's legs and jerked him roughly to his feet.

The old man belligerently demanded: "Are you women to be afraid of a man about to talk with ghosts? Untie my hands. You are young and foolish men. You do not know how to paint a man who will do you great honor by the way he will die. Are you afraid?"

The Indians approved of this sturdy bearing. He was old, just a shell of a man, but his heart was strong. Little Beaver said:

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* Manchester, Adams County, Ohio.

"He will die very brave. Let him paint himself."

His wrist thongs were unfastened and his hunting shirt was removed. He rubbed his hands and arms briskly to stimulate circulation. One young man stood behind him and the man holding the dish was before him. With much deliberation he took the fragment of pounded bark, serving as a brush, and began smearing the mixture over his scrawny chest. Little Beaver looked on approvingly.

Wild of gaze, Knight watched the old man calmly decorate himself for the fire. Bryant slowly drew a spiral and informed the interested watchers:

"This is a smoke medicine. It will keep me from choking."

Those in the background edged closer, ever keen to learn about new medicines. Little Beaver grimly suggested—

"Let the white man draw a medicine that will keep the fire from burning."

"He will do that after the smoke-medicine is finished," quietly assured the old man. "Let Little Beaver watch closely and learn about strong medicines. I heard an owl in the woods telling the ghost of my grandfather that Little Beaver's medicine is sick, or asleep."

Knights understood nothing of this exchange but felt the drama of it. The chief was now glaring malevolently and all were watching the prisoner with the greatest interest. Despite his terrible plight the younger man found himself likening the curious, expectant Indians to inquisitive little children. The comparison was grotesque, yet it persisted. The old man finished the smoke-spiral and held the dripping bark-brush high and sharply called out:

"Look! Look! With sharp eyes and see a strong medicine!"

The gaze of all was lifted to watch the brush, now slowly describing a small circle. With incredible quickness the thin claw-like hand shot forward and plucked a skinning-knife from a Wyandot's belt and almost with the same movement thrust it deep between the man's bare ribs. Simultaneously the brush was smeared across the face of the next nearest man. It was done and the prisoner was leaping toward the dusky woods before an Indian could make a move. Then Little Beaver threw up his gun and fired just as the prisoner was making cover.

Yelling like wolves, men raced after the fugitive. Knight huskily exclaimed aloud—

"He got clear!"

The old man had worked most cunningly. He had "got clear"—clear of the stake and the flaying knives, and never again could he suffer hurt. Bryant felt nauseated as the chief returned to the fire, carrying the yellowish white scalp.

THERE was no rejoicing over this trophy. Little Beaver respectfully placed it on the fire and directed that the dead warrior be hidden in the ground, or a hollow log, and that the camp be shifted a few miles. It was not a good place for Wyandot men to tarry in. The white man's medicine was about the little opening. It had saved him from the smoke and the coals, even as he had claimed that it would. He had died painlessly and had cheated his captors. He was a very wise old man, and his ghost even now was laughing at them. Around red camp-fires he would be spoken of with great respect.

The camp was moved two miles to a creek.* The men were gloomy and dispirited. A strong medicine had worked against success on this path. Once the men decided Little Beaver's medicine was responsible his following would fall off. None sensed this more quickly than the chief himself. Like his men he was in a gloomy state of mind when he took to his blankets. With his belt of rawhide around his waist Knight slept by snatches. Each time he woke up he was overwhelmed by his awful plight. It was so inexorable; so inescapable. The darkness was thinning when the first warrior rolled out and threw dry fuel on the fire. Knight's appearance plainly revealed his state of mind. Unlike Bryant he could not make-believe.

His guards rose and unfastened the thongs running from their waists to the prisoners waist. His feet were untied and he was helped to stand. The men were courteous, even gentle, but now he knew all this was deliberately planned to increase his suffering. He held out his hands for one of the men to unfasten. The Indians had no fear that he could escape; and did he try his disappointment would be their joy. One of his guards released the thong and Knight rubbed his hands and wrists smartly. As he did this he looked for a possible avenue of escape.

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* Salt Creek, Jackson County.

The Indians' guns were resting against a pole which was supported by two crotched sticks. If he attempted to run in that direction he would find but few between him and the timber, as almost all the men were around the kettle. But pursuit would be made by the warriors near the guns, which they could snatch up and use with deadly effect before he could reach cover. Had it been broad daylight he might have elected to attempt that course, and to count it success if he was shot off his feet. He had supposed all hope had left him. Now the gloomy woods, just beyond the fire, invited him to make it a race. If he took this direction he must win his way through and around the bulk of the warriors. But if he reached the growth they either would pursue him unarmed, or else lose time in running back across the opening to get guns.

He thought it out and made his decision inside a few seconds of deliberation. The very idea of attempting to do something gave him physical strength. He advanced toward the kettles. Little Beaver followed and overtook him as he halted as if waiting for his breakfast. The chief patted him on the shoulder. Knight met the smoldering gaze and smiled and nodded his head. The Indians averted their gaze to hide their amusement. The white man was believing them to be friendly. With a final pat Little Beaver dropped his hand to his side. Knight's hard fist, starting from his hip, came up with terrific force under the chief's chin and fairly lifted him off his feet. Then with a leap, and a jump to one side, and a left-handed smash in the face of a man he could not dodge, he was bursting through the fringe of bushes and plunging into the gloomy woods.

The complete surprize of it all dazed the warriors some seconds. Then they followed their first impulse, to run down and recapture their man. As they took the woods, whooping and howling, and armed only with their knives and axes, Knight fought against panic and even slowed his gait to prevent a collision with the faintly outlined trees. One of the warriors yelled for the men to secure their guns. Some ran back to do this. It was too dark for those pressing the chase to pick up the trail, and quite to his amazement Knight found himself on the bank of the creek. The infuriated yells and howls suddenly ceased and Knight at once imagined the foe were all but upon him. Still he practised enough self-control to slip into the icy waters of the creek and noiselessly make his way to the opposite bank.

He started at right angles from the stream and soon came to a long, sloping ridge, where there was more light. Up and along the ridge he ran until it did seem as if his pounding heart would burst.

For the first time he ventured to look back. He could discover no signs of pursuit, but he realized he must now sacrifice speed for cunning. Once the light strengthened, the Indians would pick up his trail and follow it at a run. He walked on ledges whenever possible. He took care not to break off twigs and small branches in passing through bush-dotted openings. He was young and in excellent physical condition. He was spurred on by the fear of something worse than death. He kept his back to the sun, and he chased after the sun. Late in the afternoon he came to a stream he knew must be the Scioto.*

He did not believe he could lift one foot ahead of the other, but fear told him he must place the river between him and his enemies. On the western bank he told himself he had done all that mortal could; and, flogged on by thoughts of Little Beaver's terrible rage, he walked with staggering steps into the sunset.

With the first light he was continuing his flight and fought pains and aches for several miles before his legs limbered up. Two hours after sunrise he killed a squirrel with a rock and ate the scanty meat raw. Fortunately his mind focused on the fear behind him and he did not take time to realize he might run into another band of Indians at any moment. He entered the rugged hills around Sunfish creek. He was determined to use every hour of light for travel, and fear served as food and drink in keeping him going. Traveling south, he crossed Scioto Brush and Turkey Creek; and everything seemed unreal. Another night and day, and he halted and stared stupidly when he beheld a broad river, which, he knew, must be the Ohio. He was ten miles below the mouth of the Scioto. He had no idea of how and when he had rested, of the meager food of nuts and raw squirrel meat. But he did know he was gazing on the Ohio and the Kentucky shore beyond. His problem now was to cross the river although it was very possible that would mean from pan to fire. He remembered poor Bryant's advice to make for Massie's Station, but he had no idea whether he was above or below it. Nor did he know how much time had elapsed since he struck Little Beaver and escaped from the Salt Creek camp.

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* Near Piketon, Pike County, Ohio.

He crawled into a thicket of bushes as a befuddling sense of helplessness swept over him. His clothing consisted of a few rags. His moccasins were worn out. His feet and limbs and chest were scratched and torn by the wildness of his flight. As he stared at his poor feet he discovered he was weeping. He fought down the weakness, and was startled into lively perception by a slight splashing noise in the current above his hiding-place. As it sounded at regular intervals and appeared to be drawing nearer he forced his way closer to the bank to stare down through the tangled growth.

He felt as if he were suffocating when he beheld a man in a canoe. The man was dressed like one of the Long Hunters who lighted the Kentucky fire.

"Take me off! Save me!" Knight hysterically called out.

The canoe swerved in to the bank and out of sight.

"I'm a white man! Save me!" he repeated. As he received no response he cried again and again to the same effect.

"Who are you?" asked a curious voice behind him.

He turned in frantic haste and beheld the man, his rifle across his left arm. The man had landed and mounted the bank and gained the rear of the fugitive's position without being heard.

IN A recital that was almost incoherent Knight told his story. The man relaxed and rested the butt of his rifle on the ground. As Knight ceased talking the other squatted on his heels and checked off.

"You're Virginny. Catched at the Big Sandy station. White man, named Bryant, was fetched in and got hisself killed. You busted loose. Injuns chasing you. That right?"

"Yes, yes. And we must be going. Set me across, will you?"

"You forgot to say what band of Injuns was it," prompted the man.

"Little Beaver and his Wyandots. Cap'n Jimmy, the whites call him. Poor Bryant told me. Chief has red stripe up and down his back."

"That's Little Beaver. All his men have red stripes till they quit his band. My name's Kinsty. I'd like to obleege you. Too much risk. If Little Beaver is on your trail he'd cross into Kentucky quicker'n scat to overhaul you."

"Good heavens! You're a white man. You don't refuse to help me?" pleaded Knight.

"I'm just saying I ain't going to cross to t'other shore and run the risk of having a Wyandot or Shawnee ax sunk in my head. There's a better way. Twenty-five miles down stream, by the Injun path, is Massie's Station. It's a bit longer by water. Know anybody there?"

"No one. Not a soul."

"Makes no difference. They'll be glad to take you in."

"If you won't go with me then set me on the path. I must get somewhere that'll be safe to close my eyes in, and sleep."

"I'll lead you there," assured Kinsty.

"Then let's get into your canoe and start now."

Kinsty shook his head.

"Safer to foller the Injun path. Whose your folks back in Virginny?"

Knight got to his feet and hurriedly told the names of his people. Kinsty worked inland and struck into the old trail. As he walked along in the lead he seemed hungry to be told things and asked many questions about Knight's home life, his friends, and the like. Knight patiently answered the queries, as he had learned this was a characteristic of isolated people. The first four questions a traveler would be asked at a frontier cabin would be: "What's your name? Where you from? Where you going? What's your business?"

Knight talked until weary, and finally complained:

"Can't we push forward faster? Seems like we was holding back."

"No hurry so long's we got to make one camp. Can't do it on a stretch. Leastways, you can't. Won't do to git tuckered out. You must be good for a long run if jumped by Injuns. You say you can't speak nary a word of red lingo?"

"Not a word."

Kinsty halted and stared at Knight thoughtfully. Then he announced:

" 'Low you're all right and are the man you say you be. But at the first I had a sneaking notion you might be Greeby."

"The monster who lives with Indians from choice and kills his own people?" exclaimed Knight in a horrified tone. For the renegade's infamous acts had been rehearsed at the Big Sandy station although the man seldom ventured that far up river.

"Now I know you're all right," chuckled Kinsty. "Only a man who's all right could speak in that way. It was your scratched legs and arms that made me suspicious. Your calling like you did was the first thing to make me suspicious. Greeby is a master hand for yelling from the shore for some one to save his pelt by setting him across the river. Some say he'll wade out in the water and pray to be took off."

"I'm what I look. A poor, helpless man in need of a friend. Why do we halt? I have many hours of energy left in me if there's a safe bed at the end of the journey."

"You think so but you'd go kerflummox first thing you know. You got to have victuals. We can't git through tonight anyway. We'll camp here off the trail and I'll shoot something and make a soup. With a full stomach and some sound sleep you'll go through to Massie's mighty fine."

"If you think best," sighed Knight. "How far is it to the station?"

"Twenty miles," replied Kinsty.

" 'Bout sixteen miles," corrected a voice from the bushes.

Kinsty exclaimed under his breath and dropped on one knee and cocked his rifle. Knight warned:

"It's all right. It's a white voice."

"It's all right after we look him over," growled Kinsty. "Stranger, whoever you be, show yourself. Both hands up and empty."

A man stepped into the path between the two men, his arms raised, one holding a long Kentucky rifle. He said: "Here I be. Had to fetch the old gun along. Think I was red?"

"I knew you was white. But keep your hands up. Knight, lift up his hunting-shirt so we can have a peek at his back."

Knight stared stupidly. The man good-naturedly requested: "Don't waste time. This gun's gitting heavy." Then to Kinsty, "Just what you looking for, mister?"

"A red stripe up and down your back, Mister," growled Kinsty.

The stranger laughed and exclaimed: "Beats all natur' how every one you meet you sort of think may be that skunk Greeby. Go ahead, younker. My name's Daniels. Been in the bush so long my back ain't very clean, mebbe. But you'll find no red stripe."

Knight stepped behind the stranger and pulled up the hunting-shirt. The back was that of a very muscular man. Daniels, without being told, slowly turned around, and Kinsty dropped the butt of his gun to the ground and barked—

"All right. But I don't take no chances with a strange white man this far down the Ohio, on either the Injun or the Kentucky shore."

Daniels chuckled as if it were a good joke. Then he silently surveyed Knight for a bit and briskly decided:

"Feller's half starved. Been running his legs off. Hide barked and scratched most tarnal. He oughter eat and sleep."

"Just what I was telling him," agreed Kinsty. "He's most bodacious to be pushing through to Massie's Station."

"Safe here for the night as he'd be at Massie's. What with Greeby and the Girtys and the Shawnees, the station is fair beset."

"If they ain't strongly forted he shouldn't go there," said Kinsty.

"They can stand off the Injuns if white renegades don't lend a hand and play some new deviltry. If Gineral Sinclair l'arned a lesson from Gineral Harmar's defeat last year we'll have peace along this river. If he gits a red ax in the head it'll keep on being death to any one planting corn north of this river. And I'm afraid for Sinclair. Little Turtle and his Miamis are ag'in him as they was ag'in Harmar," said Daniels.

"I don't think this country will ever be safe for whites," sighed Knight. "I feel faint. Wish I could eat and sleep and cross into Kentucky and make back to Richmond. I'm mortal tired of the border."

"Make a fire and I'll fetch in some small game," said Daniels. "After we've et and rested we'll see what fits the young man's case best."

He slipped into the growth and Kinsty scooped a shallow hole one side of the path and started a small blaze, feeding it with small pieces of bark until he had a deep bed of coals. Daniels came in with a turkey and some pigeons. He had knocked them over with his ax. The meat was quickly put to roasting.

Knight discovered he was ravenously hungry. He could not wait for the meat to be cooked through. He snatched a turkey leg and ate like a wolf.

"Take your time and don't wolf it in chunks," advised Daniels.

After they had finished and covered the fire-hole with branches and dirt, with two small apertures for air, Daniels jumped to his feet and announced he would scout for a bit. Kinsty said nothing until the stranger had withdrawn: then he leaned forward and whispered—

"Wish I knew more 'bout him."

Knight shivered at this suggestion that all might not be right with Daniels.

"He's a white man. He didn't have any red stripe on his back. Could he be one of the Girtys?"

"Not Simon. I seen Simon once. May be George. I'm just as skeered of him as I be of Simon."

Knight's nerves were unstrung. He groaned and complained, "I thought I'd be all right if I could live to reach the river. Now it looks worse'n it did when I was knocking Little Beaver off his feet. What shall we do? I'm fair wore out just from being afraid of what may happen."

Kinsty frowned at the threads of smoke escaping from the fire-hole vents, and after a while replied:

"We've got to make sure. He may be honest as we be. But till we know we don't want him behind us, nor scouting off one side. See here: only sensible thing for us to do is to take him to Massie's. If folks there say he's all right no harm's done."

Knight sadly exclaimed:

"Just let me git out of this country! I vow I'll stay east of the mountains if I ever get back there."

"Few miles more won't make much difference," consoled Kinsty. "If we can s'prize that feller and tie his hands and take him down stream we'll soon know if he's all right."

"He seems to be a pleasant sort of man," said Knight, now speaking more hopefully.

Kinsty laughed silently.

Then he muttered, "Pleasant? Yes, they can be that. A white man who lives with Injuns from ch'ice can be lots of things. They can wade into the river, with what looks to be blood on their face and arms, and beg for a keel-boat to swing in toward the bank and pick 'em up. No end to the traps they can set. Why, when you first called out I was sure you was bait for the trap that might snag me. Even when I see you, your legs'n arms all scratched and torn, I thought you was fixed up that way to fool me."

"That's why you kept pestering me about my folks and friends?"

"Zactly. Trying to catch you in a lie, but you rung true. Now, this is what we must do. I'll jump this feller and git the drop. You ties his hands behind him when I give the word. We'll take him through to Massie's. If he's all right he won't feel hard for the way we've used him. If he's a bad one Massie's men will settle him."

The plan repelled Knight, but he could think of nothing better. He bowed his head in agreement.

Kinsty stirred uneasily and whispered: "We got to have light. He could kill both of us in this darkness. Light to see to work by."

He tore the cover off the fire-hole and threw in dry branches and piled on dead limbs until he had a companionable blaze which brightly lighted the small opening where they had camped. In a short time careless steps sounded in the woods and soon Daniels burst through into the light and harshly demanded:

"What be you trying to do? Call down on us all the northwest tribes?"

"No danger," replied Kinsty. "Younker was in a bad way along of the darkness."

DANIELS squatted on his heels, his rifle on the ground beside him. On the opposite side of the fire Kinsty sat cross-legged, his rifle across his knees.

Knight held his breath as he discovered the two men were staring at each other fixedly. He was positive that Daniels had overheard, or had guessed their plan.

Kinsty slowly leaned back and commenced swinging the long barrel of his gun toward the fire. Then with breath-taking quickness the squatting figure straightened out and was flying through the flames to land on Kinsty before the latter could straighten out his legs. Kinsty's rifle went off, the bullet passing close to Knight's head and causing him to cry out wildly.

"Hit him!" gasped Kinsty.

Knight moved around the fire, but the interlocked figures were rolling and twisting so rapidly he had no opportunity to land a blow without running the risk of hittng the wrong man. He shuddered as he caught the flash of the firelight on two knife blades. Each man had drawn his long butcher-knife, and they grunted loudly as they endeavored to give mortal wounds. They revolved, a blur of arms and legs, out of the zone of light and crashed into the edge of the growth. Then sounded a loud groan.

Knight came out of his stupor and sprang to the rifles and snatched up Kinsty's weapon and stood desperately at bay as a figure emerged from the darkness.

With gaping mouth he leaned forward to discover which had survived the terrible duel. The figure entered the light. It was Daniels.

"You've killed him!" yelled Knight. "Put up your hands! Drop that knife!"

The man threw the knife to the ground and picked up a burning faggot. Then he commanded:

"Follow me and take a peek at your friend, who was so cur'ous to see my back. Waving the torch to keep it alive he strode to the edge of the growth. Knight followed, the rifle cocked. Swinging the torch down in a half circle the man invited, "Take a look. What d'ye see?"

The two had torn the clothing almost from each other in their desperate fight. Kinsty, with his hunting-shirt ripped from hem to collar, was lying on his face. A red stripe extended the length of his spine.

Straightening up the man continued: "Knew him the second I see him. But he didn't know me. He's one of Little Beaver's white Injuns. He's Greeby."

Knight nearly collapsed.

"Greeby the renegade! Why did he ask about my folks, my home, so many questions about everything?" he cried.

"So's he could pass off for you where your folks was known and you wa'n't. Now we'll pick up a canoe I had hid along here somewheres and cross to t'other shore."

"He was taking me to Massie's station tomorrow!"

"He was taking your ha'r back to Little Beaver, leaving you dead where he cooked your supper. No more talk. Take his gun, powder horn 'n' knife."

"Not the knife," shuddered Knight. "Can you find your canoe in the dark?"

"Why not? It ain't run away. Come, hurry. This light may fetch a parcel of Injuns on our backs."

"Lord knows I'm grateful, Daniels—"

"Boone. Dan'l Boone. Didn't want to give my name to Greeby till I had a fair chance in a fight. Told him when we was scuffling on the ground. S'prized him so mightily I got home with the knife."

TIBURCIO THE HUMORIST

by Michael J. Phillips

A SHRILL whistle sounded. The four men who sat about the campfire by the Santa Maria River, in the upper part of Santa Barbara County, California, looked at each other, startled.

They were miles from a settlement, herding a band of several thousand sheep. And in that year, 1874, there were still a few bandits abroad, though most of those who had terrorized California for a quarter century had paid the penalty of their crimes.

The youngest of the party, Louis Morris, who was only fifteen, had the most active curiosity. He went boldly out from the trees in which their camp, except for the smoke, was hidden, and stood on the bank of the little stream. The others hung back for awhile, but presently joined him.

There was no one in sight, and the whistle was not repeated. When they began to think that perhaps it was only a trick of the senses, a man rode out of the forest on the opposite bank and a few yards below them. He was mounted on a splendid black horse.

He was heavily armed. Tall, erect, and in the prime of life, he was something of a dandy in his well-kept black clothes and fancifully trimmed boots. He wore a black mustache and close-clipped beard. His olive complexion revealed that he was either Spaniard or native Californian.

The horseman saluted them with a wave of the hand.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he greeted. And then, proudly throwing back his shoulders, "I am Tiburcio Vasquez!"

The effect must have flattered his vanity, for the sheep-herders cringed.

Tiburcio Vasquez was the greatest living bandit. Cruel, said reports; a wonderful horseman, since he was credited with raids on successive days in localities an unbelievable distance apart; a dead shot; and a cunning general.

They took heart, for they recalled tales of his whimsical sense of humor, which caused him to spare as often as he struck.

"I have not yet begun robbing herders, señors," he reassured them. "Have any men on horseback been here looking for me?"

"No, sir," Louis Morris replied.

"Good!" he ejaculated, swinging from the saddle. "I wish food for myself and my horse."

They brought it, while Tiburcio rubbed down the fine animal and watered it in the stream, meanwhile talking as if it were a human. And the way the horse pricked its ears and looked at its master almost persuaded young Louis that at least it understood every word.

When he had eaten and rested for a little time, Tiburcio again mounted.

"I go this way," he announced, pointing up the river. "You tell that —— sheriff I go that way," and he pointed downstream.

In less than an hour the sheriff of Bakersfield and five deputies rode into camp, seeking Vasquez. He was wanted for wholesale killings during the robbery, a few days previously, of a country store. They searched while the waning daylight held, and then climbed neighboring hills to pick up if possible the light of the lone bandit's camp-fire. But they were unsuccessful.

A few days later he was run to earth through treachery while eating dinner in a ranch house in a Los Angeles County cañon. He had been persuaded, for the first time in years, to sit down without his weapons.

When the posse surrounded the house, he leaped backward through a window, but was badly wounded and captured. He was taken to San José, tried for murder, convicted and sentenced to be hanged. Soon after in his cell Tiburcio had two visitors—the sheriff and the district attorney.

The latter official explained their call:

"You see, Tiburcio, no one knows what crimes should be charged up to you. I am satisfied that you are accused of a great many you never committed. But at the same time there are several mysterious murders unsettled. Now if you'll confess, we'll know whether you committed them, or whether we'll have to search farther."

"Why should I confess?"

"You gain nothing by keeping still," urged the prosecutor. "You're to die in a month, anyway. And you'll rest easier in the Hereafter."

"I suppose there is a Hereafter," mused the bandit. "Better men than I have said so, señors. But I could not rest easy if I confessed crimes I did not commit. I killed no one. I have been where there were killings, ——, yes. But those who were in those fights were mostly farmers, unused to looking sharply and remembering truly what they saw. So they blamed me."

"Get out!" laughed the sheriff. "What's the use of bluffing, Tiburcio? Everybody knows you're a killer. Be a good fellow; help us clean up the State."

Though Tiburcio shook his head and shrugged, they kept at him, calling for several days in succession to plead. And finally, under their pressure, he said:

"Very well. Bring me pen and paper and I will write. On one condition—that you promise not to read until I am dead."

Eagerly they promised. For many hours Tiburcio wrote, pausing now and again to ponder. Finally he gave the sealed packet to the sheriff with the solemn reminder—

"Remember your promise."

The day of execution came. The trap was sprung. Tiburcio, who mounted the gallows with a quizzical smile on his lips, was no more. Eagerly the officials hurried to the sheriff's office. The key to many crimes, the real story of a notorious bandit, was under their hands!

Eagerly they tore open the packet, and after a few minutes of puzzlement and sulphurous language, burst into roars of laughter. Like Tiburcio, they knew a joke when they saw it.

For the bad man had left a long dissertation on how to bring up children—and nothing else!

The Phantom Major

Another story of the Ambulance Service

By

Larry Barretto

THE Ambulance Section stood stiffly erect in anticipation while their lieutenant harangued them. It was apparent from their grins of satisfaction that they had found at last the nearest spot to Paradise that they ever expected would be their lot in any part of war-torn France. The officer thought so too. He had marshaled his outfit through some of the bitterest fighting in Belgium; at Chateau-Thierry; and on the Aisne. Now to find himself transported almost overnight to the end of the line in this quiet corner of the Vosges Mountains was too good to be true. It couldn't be true, he told himself, and wiggled his toes in their polished boots to see if he were awake.

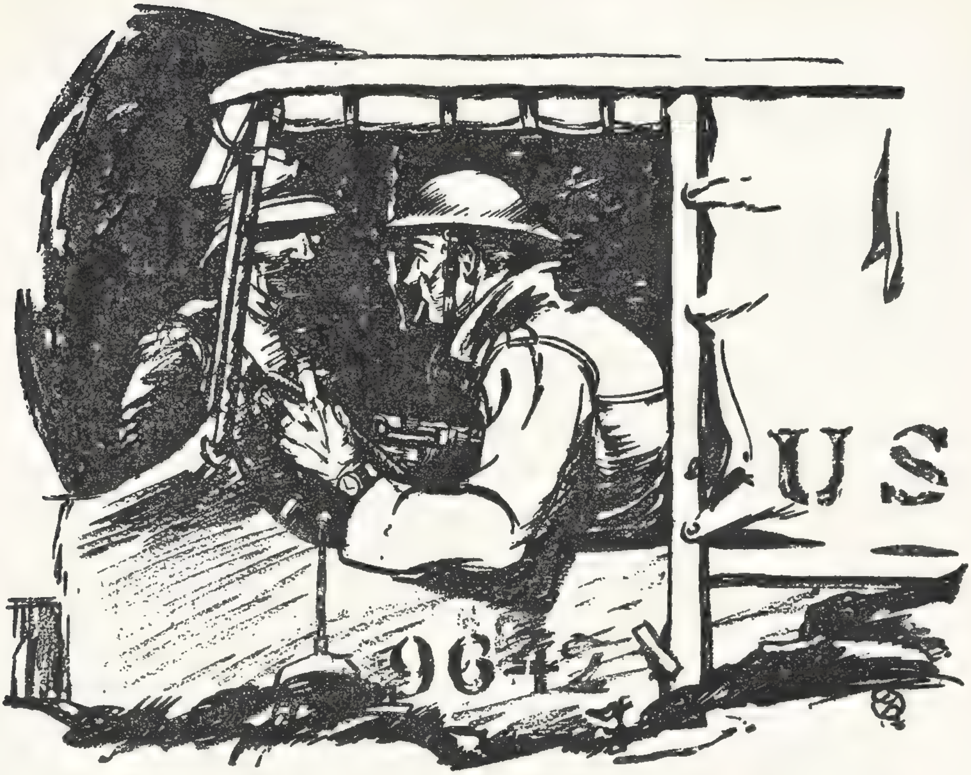
About them hung a silence as complete as that in any primeval forest. No sound of shells disturbed the quiet air. Above them the Vosges Mountains reared themselves in gloomy solitude, their slopes covered with dark pine and fir. A bird, soaring into the void, sailed, a diminishing speck, but no airplane peered down with spiteful eyes, watching the movement of troops. On the gray road which stretched toward the near-by town a group of French soldiers could be seen, their uniforms a soft blue patch, but they were not drilling. They were emerging from the Café d'Alsace, and their arms were about the waists of girls. The section panted with eagerness to join them. Their lieutenant continued to speak.

"Just because we're way off here in the Vosges and there isn't any shelling, you needn't think the war is over," he said by way of discipline. "There's work to be done and we're going to do it. Not as much work as you are accustomed to," he added and grinned again. "I will now assign your posts."

The sergeant stepped forward and handed him a paper. The lieutenant glanced at it.

"The *médecin chef* tells me that there are only four posts to be filled. That means that four cars and four men will be out at a time. The rest of you will have to content yourselves with the quarters here until your turn comes."

He gestured to the billets behind them



which had been taken over—a small hotel that had once been occupied by tourists crossing the mountains from France to Alsace. With one movement the section turned and stared with him, open-mouthed. In this hotel there need be no more than two men to a room; there were sheets on the beds; there was a bar at which could be bought beer better than any they had tasted in the rest of France, and the landlady had offered to cook for a moderate price!

These were men who had slept in wheat fields to escape the bombing of towns, who had thought themselves lucky to get a meal of "goldfish" and corned willy, and who during an attack had worked for forty hours at a stretch until they dozed at the wheels of their cars, still moving.

"Now for the assignments," continued the lieutenant briskly with the air of a conjuror exhibiting all his bag of tricks. "One car goes to the Col de la Schlucte. That is only twenty minutes away, so the driver may wait here until the *triage* there telephones in. I am credibly informed that they never telephone—no shell has fallen near the place for two months. Nevertheless it is a job. Norris, you take it."

From the look on Norris's face one could believe that he hoped the job would be permanent.

"Two cars are needed for the hospital in Gerardmer—that is the big town where we detrained last night. These cars will take the wounded to the railroad station when necessary. Grindley and O'Brien. You want to behave yourselves and be on the job," the lieutenant warned them. "I know all about the cafés and the pretty girls there, but you lay off the cafés and forget the girls, and I'll be there myself to see that you do it. This is war."

"It's a tough war!" somebody murmured and the whole outfit grinned in comprehension. This lieutenant was a wonder, after all. He had driven them like a maniac at Kemel Hill and Soissons, but give him a chance and see what he could do!

"The last post," the officer concluded, "is far away from here. Over thirty kilometers in fact. It is at a place called Lac Noir. That means Black Lake," he explained kindly. "Because it is so far, because we are short of gas and because these hills wear out the brakes and speeds, the car that goes there will remain one week, unless it gets a wounded man to bring in, of course. That isn't likely though. I understand that both the French and the Boche are only doing patrol work through the woods, there are no trenches and they wouldn't fire on one another on a bet. It's a sort of gentleman's agreement."

Into the hearts of the twenty-six men who had not yet been chosen there came cold fear. The lucky three who had picked easy assignments watched their friends with callous curiosity. No one wanted to go thirty kilometers away to a place called Black Lake even if there was no fighting. Probably there was not a café within miles of it, and certainly no girls. The wretched man who was chosen would be literally entombed while the others rioted in Gerardmer. And for one week! The war might be over before he got back. The lieutenant looked at the anxious faces thoughtfully.

"Hartley," he said suddenly as if to get an unpleasant duty over.

Hartley gave a groan of sheer anguish. He had smooth black hair and quick black eyes, he had an ingratiating smile, and his clothes even in the roughest of campaigns were always neat. Until the war he had never been farther than ten miles from Broadway. There was no one in the section who loved so dearly an evening spent over a table slopped with beer suds, or who could catch the eye of a barmaid with greater facility and less fear of rebuke. For him to be isolated in the depths of the mountains was cruel. He himself was convinced of it.

"Why pick on me?" he muttered.

"I'm not picking on you," the lieutenant retorted. Even when one did his best he couldn't satisfy these men. "Somebody has to go. Why shouldn't you?"

"I don't know how to get there and I can't speak any French," Hartley answered sulkily, digging his toe into the ground.

"Sergeant Brooks will show you the road on a map—and if you can't speak French it's your own fault. You've been over here a year."

"But, Lieutenant, I don't know a word. If I get stuck off there with the frogs for a week I may get tongue-tied or something. Can't one of the other fellows go with me just to keep me company? There's only four of us working."

The officer considered this. After all it did seem unnecessarily severe.

"Very well. Who do you want?" he assented.

Hartley's eye roved down the line.

"Oleson," he said promptly, already more cheerful. "I'll take Joe Oleson. He's a pal of mine."

They had shared their food, their clothes and their dangers, but in this moment Oleson became Hartley's bitterest enemy. In pure selfishness he too had been wrested from the delights of Gerardmer—its bright streets, its cafés and cinema theater.

"I'll do you dirt for this before the week is out, Jim Hartley," he told himself. "You wait and see."

"Section dismissed," said the lieutenant, blandly unconscious of the discord in his official family. "Have a good time, but be discreet and don't get drunk. Remember this is war."

IT WAS war at any rate between Hartley and Oleson. Their ambulance toiled up the steep road from the camp, the silence broken only by the hum of the motor. Neither of the men spoke. They had met after the lieutenant had dismissed them and had expressed opinions freely. Such words as "slacker," "yellow" and stronger had been tossed about. Only the presence of the watchful sergeant had prevented open hostilities. Hartley had been astonished, hurt and then angry. It never occurred to him that Joe Oleson would be unwilling to sacrifice a week of pleasure to be with his friend. Not to do so seemed like gross betrayal.

Oleson felt otherwise about it. He sat in the ambulance next to the driver's seat, the road map clutched in his hand, a blond and sulky giant, his heart seething with bitterness. What was the matter with Jim Hartley, he wondered. Once when Hartley had been ill, he, Oleson, had given up a leave to Nice in order to stay with him. He had tossed away seven gorgeous days on the Riviera just like that, because he thought the other man had needed him. And this was his reward. To be thrust into the wilds of these mountains simply because Hartley wanted some one to talk to him.

"I won't say a —— word," he told himself and set his lips tighter.

The road over which they were traveling became steeper and more devious. It climbed up and up, crawling along rocky ledges, through aisles of black fir which, arching overhead, shut out the sky. Dim chasms yawned beneath them, filled with a perpetual gray mist that swam up toward them, moistening their skin and turning the leather seat slimy. At intervals on more open spaces, roads which were mere bridle paths diverged to right and left, wandering off into the unknown. When these appeared Hartley slowed the car and looked at Oleson anxiously. The latter, tracing the course on his map with a stubby forefinger, indicated the direction with a nod.

The silence began wearing on Hartley's nerves. He had never been one to keep his thoughts to himself for long. The indignation which he had felt at Oleson's sulkiness had faded into depression. After all, they had been good friends. Now he sought to heal the breach between them.

"Want to drive, Oley?" His voice was conciliatory.

Oleson turned a pair of cold blue eyes on him.

"What the —— I want to drive for? You think I've never driven before?"

"Well, I thought you might," Hartley answered mildly.

There was silence for another mile.

"Say, Oley," Hartley began again. "It may not be so bad—this Black Lake, I mean. Perhaps you'll pick up some souvenirs."

Oleson had a passion for souvenirs. A belt buckle with *Gott Mit Uns* on it fascinated him, a German helmet, especially one smeared with camouflage, was a prize, and a pair of field-glasses threw him into ecstasies. He had been known to stop his car in the midst of a bombardment to cut the buttons from a prisoner's uniform, and he had robbed more dead than any one man in three divisions. This mention of souvenirs was obviously a bait, but Oleson did not rise.

"Souvenirs!" he exclaimed scornfully. "The only souvenirs that we'll get in this place will be pine-cones!"

"But you might," Hartley continued eagerly, glad to hear the sound of his own voice. "These woods ought to be full of stuff. I shouldn't be surprized if you found—"

"Will you shut up?" Oleson demanded ominously. "When I think that I might be getting stewed in Gerardmer at this minute it makes me sick to have to sit here listening to your gas."

"All right, Joe Oleson," Hartley cried. "I can keep my mouth shut as long as you can. This is what comes of being friends with a Swede! I might have known it would be like this."

Oleson did not answer. Again the silence became intense, broken only by the noise of the car and the faint moaning of the wind through the trees.

It was dusk when they reached Lac Noir. The place fulfilled their worst expectations. It was more dismal than they had imagined.

The lake stretched away for a half mile like veined black basalt, smooth and treacherous in the darkness, its banks covered with dank and rotting vegetation. Around it the shadows of trees rose sentinel-like, and above them again the Vosges Mountains towered, overpowering and crushing. In the hollow thus formed was the village, a miserable collection of rough houses deserted now by their owners, goat herders and charcoal burners, and tumbling into decay through nearly four years of war. In the midst of them stood the cantonment, a long wooden barracks with a tar paper roof. Before the door of it French soldiers loitered. In some of the other houses were glimmering lights where the officers were quartered.

"We'll have to report first," Hartley said, breaking the long silence. "You'd better speak, Oleson. I'm not much good at French."

"Speak yourself," Oleson answered. "I'm here to keep you company, not to get your orders for you."

Hartley shrugged resigned shoulders.

"Very well, if you leave it to me we'll probably starve to death. I can't even say 'fried eggs.' "

There was, however, no need for an interpreter. In the largest of the houses they found the officer in charge of the village—a captain with rosy cheeks and a plump figure which bulged in his uniform. He spoke English sufficiently well. The two Americans stood before him while he looked them over with the critical eye by which French officers appraised their allies.

"*Soldats Américains*, from Gerardmer, is it not so?" he asked when his inspection was finished.

They assured him that he was correct.

"I have been *notifié*—zat is, warned of your coming," the captain continued. "By telephone."

He tapped the instrument on the table before him importantly.

"But you are late."

"We couldn't get here any sooner," Hartley explained defensively. "It's a long way."

"So. Which way you come, *alors?* By Mittlach?"

The Americans looked at each other.

"Mittlach? What's that—a town? No, we came around the mountains like this—"

Oleson opened his map and traced the line. The captain's ruddy cheeks turned pale with excitement.

"*Mon Dieu! Mais non!* Eet is not possible. You should not have went like that. Here and here and here are ze German lines. Half ze time in, half ze time out. You have took a route of ze utmost danger! Ze patrols, zey are all ze time across zoze roads. To be captured one goes zat way. You should have come by Mittlach—ze roads are steeper up and down, but eet is more safe."

The Americans who had been standing as far apart as possible, hating each other, drew closer together. Oleson glanced at Hartley.

"My ——!" he said abruptly.

"Wouldn't you know it?" Hartley answered. "That man Brooks doesn't know his ankle from his elbow. Does it mean anything to him if we get killed? It does not!"

"*Bien.* You are here," the captain told them, recovering from his excitement as quickly as he had fallen into it. "You will stay one week. Yes? But of one thing I must warn you. Do not leave ze town. No. Not at all."

"Why not?" Oleson asked, disappointed that his search for possible souvenirs was to be curtailed.

"Why not indeed!" The captain spread expressive hands. "Eet is enough that I tell you so. If you wander eet is danger, that is—*le major fantôme*—difficult to say. Your sacred language!"

"The phantom major," Oleson said. "Go on, I understand. What is it—a ghost?"

"Ah, you speak French! *Bien entendu. Écoutez.*"

He spoke rapidly for a minute.

"And now," he concluded. "Eet is understood. Go to the *caserne* for food and sleep. *Allez, mes enfants. À la soupe!*"

The Americans saluted and left the bright office. Outside the night seemed blacker and more restless than before. The wind had risen and the trees swayed together, tossing their arms toward a starless sky.

"I don't like it," Hartley muttered. "This —— moaning sound gets my goat. I'd rather have shells."

He pressed closer to Oleson's side, but the latter did not answer.

"Say something, Oley, for the love of Mike. I wish I'd never asked you to come. What did his Nibs say about that ghost you were talking about? The phantom major. If we can't leave the village you might at least tell me why."

"You didn't ask me to come, you made me come," Oleson corrected him explicitly. "And I'll tell you about the phantom major, you bet I will, you blockhead, just so you can see what a mess we've got into. Listen here. There's a German officer who wanders around these woods dressed as a French major, or maybe it's a captain or a lieutenant sometimes. He speaks their lingo like a shot and no one can tell him from a frog. Well, you're going along these lonely roads with a wagon of ammunition or food and the first thing you know he appears beside you and directs you to go down another way, saying the road ahead has been cut off. You turn off like he tells you to and suddenly you're surrounded by a patrol! Then, zowie, you wake up in Germany!"

"What do they turn off for?" Hartley asked sensibly.

Oleson snorted his contempt.

"Two or three didn't, and one guy was court-martialed for that and the rest ran into the Germans just as the officer said. You see he was the real thing that time."

Hartley digested this in silence.

"I don't believe it, anyway," he said at last. "Look at us. The captain said we came right through part of the German line, but we didn't see anything or hear anything either. This major story is just scare stuff to keep us around headquarters. I don't believe it."

"No, you wouldn't. Just the same the captain told me that General Messimy has posted a reward of a thousand francs for this major guy, dead or alive. Chew on that for a while."

They had reached the door of the barracks and were about to enter.

"I believe you're afraid," Hartley said scornfully. "Keep your yeller hidden, Oley!"

Oleson towered above him, his fists clenched, his face flushing.

"If I thought you meant that, I'd wring your dirty little neck, Hartley," he choked.

"Let's eat first, then you can try it if you please," Hartley retorted.

And so these two who had been sworn friends for eighteen months sat down glowering, to their first meal at Lac Noir.

The meal was not a success. All the Frenchmen had eaten, but the cook managed to find something for the Americans. The soup was cold and watery. When that was disposed of two tin plates of stew were placed before them.

"This chicken is delicious," Oleson said in French, examining one of the bones doubtfully.

"Chicken!" cried a stretcher-bearer scornfully. "That is not chicken, it's cat! Yesterday the provision wagon should have arrived, but it did not. It was reported by telephone to have left Mittlach, nevertheless our patrols can find no trace of it. The phantom major has captured it of course. Now there is almost no food. We in Lac Noir are forgotten as usual."

Oleson pushed back his plate.

"Is that true?" he demanded.

The cook nodded apathetically.

"Yes. Today we ate the cat, tomorrow we eat the dog!"

Until the end of the meal the blond Swede only played with his food, but he watched every mouthful that Hartley ate with an affectionate, almost a passionate interest. When he was entirely finished Oleson had the pleasure of telling him that his food had been purring by the fire only a few hours before. Hartley's lips became pallid and he laid his cup of coffee on the table unfinished.

"That's the dirtiest trick you ever played, Joe Oleson!" he cried. "I can eat horse meat, but I can't stand cat!"

He rose suddenly from the table and hurried to the door where he stood for a long time staring out into the night. When he returned Oleson was unrolling his blankets and preparing a bed in one corner of the long room. Already the Frenchmen were beginning to snore around him or were sitting on the edges of their stretchers unwrapping their spirals. Hartley picked up his blankets and prepared his bed near the door at the extreme end of the room from Oleson.

"Ain't you going to sleep by me, Jim?" Oleson called, touched with compunction. "We can fix the blankets double."

"I hope to keep as far away from you as I can till the end of the week," Hartley answered bitterly. "I don't want your blankets."

"Oh, suit yourself then," Oleson grunted, turning on his side.

The Frenchmen who were still awake watched them with faint interest. Americans were queer cattle. They arrived together, but they hardly spoke and they slept apart. Then sleep claimed them. Outside the rising wind howled through the trees and across the surface of Black Lake.

AT MIDNIGHT Hartley sat bolt upright on the stretcher. He had been sleeping uneasily, perhaps because of the foul air which filled the room. True to custom the French had not only closed all the windows but they had sealed as well with rags and papers every crack which might have added to the ventilation. He lay there in the fetid atmosphere, his head aching, too drowsy to know what had disturbed him. Then he saw. A few yards away one of the Frenchmen had risen heavily from his bed and was drawing on his shoes preparatory to leaving the room. Hartley watched him incuriously. In a minute or so he would return and they would sleep again. In the meanwhile a little fresh air would come in through the open door.

At the far end of the room in the dim light that flickered from an oil-lamp Hartley thought he saw Oleson turn on his stretcher. It occurred to him to call out, asking whether his former friend was awake, then the memory of that undigested cat returned to deter him. Joe Oleson could choke before he would speak to him. Hartley hoped he would.

The Frenchman struggled into his shoes and rose to his feet, grunting and muttering to himself. He walked down the middle of the room avoiding the sleeping men and opened the door. Hartley could see him as he passed his bed—a stoop-shouldered, middle-aged man with a ragged beard. Probably one of the stretcher-bearers. He paused at the door for a moment, sniffing the night air, and then stepped out closing it softly behind him. Hartley had a passing regret that it had not been left open. Then he lay down again to sleep, but sleep would not come.

Five minutes passed, and ten and fifteen. But the stretcher-bearer did not return. Hartley became uneasy. Obviously the man was not going on duty anywhere at this time of night. He had not put on his blouse and his great-coat still lay across the foot of his stretcher. Fantastic notions filled the mind of the American. Perhaps this man was a spy, creeping away through the darkness with secret information. But that was unlikely. No movements of importance had taken place here for months, and there was no information.

Perhaps on the other hand the man was deranged—weary of this never-ending war, and had stolen out to throw himself into the black waters of Lac Noir. Hartley had a moment of panic as he visualized the body floating in those dark currents. Possibly it would drift across to the German side of the lake, mute evidence of what they were doing to men. A cold sweat sprang out on his face and neck. In even so short a time this place had ripped his nerves to ribbons. There was no fighting here—only the wind which sighed forever through the trees—

"Joe!" he whispered. "Joe! You awake?"

"What's up?" came the answer, slowly as if Oleson were reluctant to speak.

"That stretcher-bearer. Did you see him? He went out twenty minutes ago by my watch and he hasn't come back yet. Hadn't we better do something about it?"

"What do you want us to do?" Oleson demanded, wide awake now. "I ain't a wet nurse to a stretcher-bearer."

"We ought to tell some one," Hartley insisted. "I've got a hunch that something's wrong. Suppose he's gone coo-coo and thrown himself in the lake?"

"Well, suppose he has," Oleson answered comfortably. "This war is lousy with stretcher-bearers except when you need 'em."

"But Joe!"

"Good night! You're scared, Jim, that's all. Who's yeller now?"

"You are, you big bum, letting a poor guy—"

"Sacred name of a pig!" cried a Frenchman sitting up. "What is all this chatter about?"

"Now you've done it," Oleson sighed. He explained rapidly in French: "My comrade has an attack of nerves. He is not well. Because a stretcher-bearer went outside twenty minutes ago and has not returned he thinks—"

"How long ago?"

"About twenty minutes."

"*Mon Dieu!* Why did you not tell us? Gaston, André, Pierre, Louis! Awake. Raymond has gone—into the night!"

Instantly the room was thrown into confusion. Men scrambled from their blankets, searching for their shoes and thrusting their arms into overcoats. They hurried toward the door to gather there, an incoherent, uncertain mass, lacking leadership. Some had caught up trenching tools, one had armed himself with the butcher knife, a few had had the forethought to light lanterns. They gesticulated and muttered.

"I knew something was up," Hartley cried in bitter triumph. "But what is it?"

"It's that —— phantom major," Oleson told him, sobered now. "They think that he has got the man named Raymond."

"Well, why don't they do something about it?" Hartley cried. He might have tremors in the dark; wind in the trees could make him shudder, but when there was action he forgot himself.

Oleson stared at him.

"They don't want to go out there not knowing what they're facing. Do you?" he asked slowly.

"Yes, I do!" Hartley cried, thrusting himself among the men and flinging open the door. "Who's yeller now?"

As if at a signal all the men pushed out after him. The clouds had blown away and a pale moon cast a sick light down on them. It etched streaks of pallid silver on the black lake and touched the tree-tops on the Vosges Mountains which reared above them, impenetrable and aloof. The houses of the village were black masses, quiet and undisturbed. There was a great silence everywhere, save only for the forests, murmuring *hush, hush.*

For a moment the little group stood awed and then they began to search, keeping close together, fearful of the shadows which pressed about them. There was no sign of any struggle near the door. The road leading through the village was empty. But in the direction of the latrines the damp grass was pressed down as if a body had been dragged over it, and a few feet beyond was a leather belt. The name, Raymond Barlot, scratched on the inside, told who it had belonged to. There the trail ended.

Frightened and silent the men returned to the wooden barracks. Two of them stumped off toward the officers' quarters, their lantern bobbing between them. Hartley's moment of daring was over. This dim night, the treacherous lake and those everlasting mountains chilled him. If this was war, then he preferred the whine of shells, the smell of gas. If he slept he would dream about the man named Raymond who had stepped ten feet from the door to disappear forever. Automatically he began dragging his bed toward the middle of the room. A voice at his elbow startled him.

"Say, Jim, you needn't think I'm yeller just because I didn't go out first."

"Yellow is something that gets a man by the throat when he least expects it," Hartley said almost to himself. "You might have been, Joe, and then again you mightn't."

"Well, I'm not!" Oleson cried, his ready temper flaring. "You're yeller, yourself. If you ain't what are you moving your bed away from the door for?"

"I guess I can get out of a draft if I want to," Hartley answered with dignity. He looked down. "What are *you* hauling your bed up beside mine for?"

Oleson looked embarrassed.

"I want to get away from the frogs. They smell worse than you do."

"Let's sleep," Hartley answered wearily. "Will we ever get out of this hole!"

THE next day dawned in a cold drizzle of rain. Now the tops of the mountains were lost in the mist that rolled billowing about them. From the lake, moisture like steam arose and flowed in on the village of Lac Noir, covering it and hiding it.

There had been a perfunctory search made for the missing stretcher-bearer. A detail of soldiers was withdrawn from its patrol and disappeared in the woods, led by a lieutenant who held a drawn revolver. But in a couple of hours the men returned with nothing to report. The forest which stretched away, dark and silent, was deserted. Nobody was surprized at this. The Phantom Major would hardly be waiting to be captured. By now he was probably twenty kilometers away.

Hartley and Oleson were moody. Their animosity of the previous day had largely died down, but in its place had come a deep depression which sealed their mouths as effectually as anger. Now there was no question of wandering off in search of souvenirs; last night's alarm had shown them the danger of that. Unable to endure the heavy air of the barracks, they sat on opposite ends of a log, thinking of Gerardmer and the gay life there. Hartley spoke once.

"I suppose we ought to tighten up the brake bands on the car. Those hills nearly wore them out yesterday. At the end coming down I had to use the emergency instead of the foot brake and my 'first' is about worn through from climbing. No kick to it."

Oleson looked up with an effort.

"Oh, let it wait," he said. "We've got a week to do it in."

"But, Joe, suppose we get a call."

"We won't," Oleson answered, "but if we do the 'first' will get us to the top of the mountains and then you can use your reverse as a brake going down."

"All right," Hartley said indifferently.

By two o'clock in the afternoon the camp was thrown into confusion again. Far off in the woods a tocsin began to clang, a thin, insistent sound beating on the still air. The two men looked at each other.

"What the ——'s that?"

Soldiers who had been loafing about the village off duty, sprang to their arms. The old stretcher-bearers and road-menders loosened their gas-masks. Oleson questioned one of them.

"*Alerte de gaz,*" he answered, peering anxiously in the direction of the sound.

"It's the warning of a gas attack," Oleson said. "I suppose the Boche sneaked up and threw a couple of phosgene bombs into a French patrol. Anyway it's too far off to bother us. What do you suppose the signal is? It sounds like a blacksmith hitting his anvil."

"Probably an iron wheel. If you strike it hard enough the sound will carry for miles. Listen! It's stopped now. There goes a fresh patrol on the double-quick, with stretcher-bearers too."

He pointed to the file of men disappearing into the woods.

Maybe they'll bring back a casualty and then we can get out of this dump," said Oleson hopefully.

There was not one casualty, but twenty-eight. Less than an hour later they began coming in and none of them was walking! In a slow, uneven procession the stretchers emerged from the woods, each with a figure on it covered by a blanket which was deposited at the hospital before the bearers returned for more. The Americans went across to the building and entered.

"My ——, it's too awful!" Hartley gasped and turned away.

Lamps which had been lighted in the murky gloom filled the room with a yellow glare. The doctor, his coat off, hurried from one patient to another. They lay on the floor in long rows, their shirts and blouses torn open by desperate fingers to give their panting lungs more air. Their exposed chests heaved and strained as if they were bursting bands of invisible iron which held them bound and suffocating. No one spoke, but from their lips came a constant bubbling sound as if the lungs were perforated. In one corner of the room a young boy shrieked and shrieked again, a high and delirious cry. Some of the men were already quiet, stiffened hands clutching blankets, their figures suddenly oddly contorted. As the Americans watched, one man died, and another, and another.

The captain in charge of the village hurried in followed by an orderly.

"There is no change?" he asked. "Nothing that can be done?"

The doctor flung his hands apart in an expression of hopelessness. He was old and was openly weeping. That even more than the tormented, dying men convinced Hartley and Oleson that something very dreadful, something more appalling than the usual toll of war, had happened.

"Nothing, Captain. They drown before my eyes!"

"So," said the officer. "Those swine! Those barbarous swine! My whole patrol. Twenty-eight men!"

He drew a long breath as if he too was choking. He was no longer the ruddy, pompous little man whose uniform was too tight. Now his face was gray; a grim fury gave his figure majesty.

"I have reached Mittlach at last by telephone and have received instructions—"

He turned to the Americans who stood near the door hemmed in by a group of staring, craning Frenchmen.

"A patrol was attacked with gas," he explained to Oleson, "and you see!"

He pointed to the floor.

"Not one escaped. Those who did not have time to put on masks are dead. Those who were wearing masks are dying." He paused. The Americans stared at him, hardly understanding. The captain continued:

"The masks did not keep the gas out. It went through them as it would go through paper! The Germans have found a means to win the war!"

A shiver went through the group of men—an involuntary swaying together for protection.

"You will leave at once with your ambulance," the captain said more calmly. "You will take one of the bodies with you. Do not attempt to reach Gerardmer, but go direct to Mittlach—it is nearer. Report at the hospital with the corpse so that the lungs may be analyzed. You will get through?"

He looked at them anxiously.

"We'll try to," Oleson told him. "But it is getting dark and we don't know the Mittlach road."

"You must!" the captain cried. "Soldiers everywhere, millions of them, French, American, English, from Belgium to the Vosges, depend on your reaching Mittlach tonight!"

Even Hartley could understand that.

"We will, sir," he answered, saluting.

They left the room at once to get their car. Outside the gray light was growing dimmer; even the whispering trees had become silent.

"My God!" cried Hartley in sudden anguish. "We never fixed those brake bands!"

"It can't be helped now," Oleson answered, struggling with an extra can of gasoline. "We'll get through somehow."

THEIR spirits rose as they left the village of Lac Noir behind them. As the car climbed the steep hill the houses were lost in the forest and only the sullen lake remained in sight. Presently that too disappeared. It seemed as if some malign influence which hung over the place had been withdrawn. They breathed more freely. Only the body in the car remained as evidence of the gas-raid which had had such disastrous results.

It acted in a manner that was strangely and unpleasantly human. As the car went down a slope in the road it slid forward against the front of the ambulance with a bump; when the car began climbing the hill again they could hear the heavy shoes scraping the tail-board.

"It sounds alive to me," Hartley observed. "You don't suppose they slipped a wounded man in on us, do you?"

"No, I don't. He's as dead as your great-grandfather. Can't you drive any faster?" Oleson asked uncomfortably.

"Well, I'm doing my best," Hartley insisted. "I can't get the car in high on this hill, and my 'first' is almost worn out. Look at your map and see when we get to the top."

"It's miles yet. Don't give her so much gas; you race your engine."

They continued, always upward; toward the top of the world, it seemed. Steam was coming through the radiator cap; the water boiling. As they mounted, the trees grew thinner and there was more light, but the gray fog rising from the cañons crept stealthily toward them.

"Hurry!" Oleson cried. "If we get caught in this we'll be lost forever."

"What do you expect me to do?" Hartley cried indignantly, straining over the wheel as if to force the car forward. "This band is almost gone. It's your fault for not letting me tighten it."

"I'm not your boss," Oleson retorted. "Anyway we can't do anything about it now. We've got to get to Mittlach."

Hartley looked at him scornfully.

"I should say not! There's nothing left but a thread of webbing. I can feel it."

A moment later he spoke again, a note of panic in his voice.

"It's going, Oley! It's going! Get out and push."

"Why don't you push? I'll drive," Oleson countered.

"I'm only half your size, you big loafer!" There were tears of exasperation in Hartley's voice. "All right then, if you want to sit in this car all night with a dead man, do it. Only remember that it means something to us, too, to get that gas analyzed."

Reluctantly Oleson jumped off the car and ran around to the back.

"Don't let it drag you," Hartley cried. "Push it!"

A string of breathless profanity convinced him that Oleson was really working. So they progressed painfully, inch by inch. The hill suddenly ended in a plateau and the car moved normally again. Red and exhausted, Oleson took his seat once more by the driver. It was growing dark now, but by the roadside his keen eyes noticed something.

"Stop, Jim!" he yelled. "Stop!"

Hartley brought the car to a grinding halt.

"What is it?" he demanded, his voice colorless with fright.

"A salvage dump," Oleson cried ecstatically. "Look at it!"

The other peered at the piles of dirty blankets, odd shoes, rusted bayonets and tin cans that were littered together.

"You leave that alone, Joe Oleson," he said with decision. "If you once get your paws in that mess we'll never get away."

But Oleson was already digging into the heap, turning it over, indifferent to the barbed wire that scratched his hands.

"Lookee here! An old style gas-mask. But I've got three of those."

He threw it away.

"Joe, if you don't get back into this car before I count ten I'll drive on and leave you. One—two—"

Oleson wasted no breath in vain expostulation, but at the count of nine he staggered back into the road, his arms laden.

"Look what I got!" he exclaimed. "A *mitrailleuse!* Ain't it a beaut?"

Hartley looked at the machine-gun whose tripods were bent and whose cartridge belt was rotted away.

"No, it is not," he said disgusted. "Throw it in back and let's go."

"We can make time now," Oleson consoled him, his trip already a success. "It's down-hill all the way."

But it was not such an easy matter. The foot brake wore out almost immediately and the emergency followed. These Ford ambulances were not built for such hills. Hartley was depending entirely on his reverse now to slow him down while the car rushed on with ever-increasing speed. The woods became thicker again and the road twisted through walls of sheer rock that rose above it.

"Slow up!" Oleson cried. "How can I see this map if you go so fast?"

Hartley promptly ran the car into the bank.

"The reverse is done," he said. "Now what will we do?"

They stared at each other in the gathering gloom.

"Are you sure?"

Oleson tested it and found it was so.

"Well, it isn't our fault, Jim. The loot can't blame us. It's these hills."

"I don't want to stay here all night," Hartley protested nervously. "And what about that body? We've got to get it to Mittlach somehow."

"We might carry it into Mittlach on the stretcher," Oleson suggested. "I figure it's only about eight kilometers more."

"Eight kilometers! I can't carry it that far. Have a heart, Joe, I only weigh a hundred and twenty pounds."

Oleson lighted a cigaret and stretched himself on the seat.

"All right then, you think up something."

"You're so big and strong," Hartley began delicately. "Couldn't you put him on your back, Joe? We could rest every few minutes. He isn't heavy."

"No, I couldn't," Oleson answered sharply. "I've never carried a stiff on my back yet, and I'm not going to begin now."

They smoked in silence for a few minutes. The fog crept up and surrounded them. Oleson was the first to speak.

"We'll freeze out here," he complained. "All right then, I'll be the goat as usual. Get the car out of this bank and I'll try to hold it back by the tail-board. Maybe we can get in that way."

"It's easier than pushing, Joe," Hartley said softly.

Oleson threw his cigaret away and disappeared behind the ambulance again. A moment later sounds arose from the inside.

"Hey, what you doing?" Hartley demanded, the hair on his head rising.

A muffled voice answered him.

"Tying the poor frog on the stretcher with my belt. He bounces round so that if his feet come through this tail-board he'll kick me in the mouth."

"Hurry up then. This fog isn't healthy."

There was no answer; the silence became intense.

"*Halte là!*" came a pleasant voice from the dimness.

A lean face with very bright eyes swam out of the mist beside Hartley and looked at him. The man wore the uniform of a French officer. The American could see the facings on his collar and his heart turned cold. As the rest of the body appeared he could see that this officer held his hand negligently at his waist.

"Ah," continued the man in perfect English now. "I had supposed in the darkness that you were French like myself. It is no matter; you are an ally. I am here to warn you that you can not reach Mittlach by this road. A German patrol has been thrown across it. You must turn a few yards ahead to the right. That way is safe and almost as quick. I will ride with you for a while."

A panic of doubt seized Hartley. This was perhaps the Phantom Major who led unsuspecting men into the German lines. He thought of the stretcher-bearer who had vanished into the night, the provision wagon that had disappeared, and he shivered. On the other hand he might well be a French officer and if so there were enemy patrols ahead. He was about to call to Oleson; then an instinct closed his mouth. Joe must have heard, and yet he had not spoken. The silence from the inside of the ambulance was as complete as if only the dead filled it. If this was a trap, then better that only one be captured. In the darkness Joe might escape.

"You are carrying wounded?" the officer asked, more urgently now. "We must not delay getting them to the hospital and so we will start."

Hartley wet his stiff lips.

"I have a dead body in there, sir," he answered faintly. "I was taking it to the hospital at Mittlach, but I can't go any farther. If I started, the car would run away and be smashed on these hills. My brakes are worn out."

The officer leaned forward and tested the brakes with his hand.

"It is true," he said thoughtfully, and straightened up.

It was almost like a trick of legerdemain. One second his hand was empty, and the next it held a revolver pressed against the pit of Hartley's stomach.

"In the Imperial Army," murmured the voice, ominously quiet, "you would be shot for breaking your car so near the lines. But you are an American and without discipline. Don't move from that seat. You are my prisoner."

He raised a whistle to his lips and blew a shrill note. They could hardly have been more than a score of yards away, so quickly was the road filled with them—Germans, a dozen or more, dressed in their shabby uniforms of dusty green, their heavy boots and heavier helmets. They held their rifles thrust forward from the hip as they surrounded the ambulance. Hartley, watching them, leaned forward on the wheel of his car. His legs had turned to water and his stomach felt as if it were dropping away, leaving him an empty shell.

The officer looked at Hartley contemptuously as if he were unworthy of further notice, and then walked casually to the back of the car. He lifted the canvas flap that covered it and peered within. In the dimness he could see the outline of a rigid figure lying on its stretcher and beside it a pile of heaped-up blankets. Satisfied, he dropped the flap and turned away.

In a few minutes the man who had been sent off returned with a length of rope. The officer explained to Hartley:

"My men will tie the rope underneath the car so that they may hold it back from coasting too fast down the hill. Then you will steer and I will sit beside you telling you where to go. But not to Mittlach," he added softly. "No, not to Mittlach."

Hartley nodded in understanding.

"Yes, sir," he managed to articulate.

The German returned to the back of the car to superintend the placing of the rope around the spring. On the driver's seat Hartley waited, and trembled. Suddenly a sharp exclamation broke out, a gasp of astonishment, followed by silence.

"They've found Joe!" Hartley thought, and prepared for instant death. The penalty for such deception could not be less.

But no sound of fury broke out. Very softly a voice was speaking through the little window at the back of his head.

"Get their guns, Jim. I've got 'em stopped!"

Hartley did not hesitate. There was a note of passionate entreaty in Oleson's voice which forced him off the seat. What he saw chilled him. The curtain of the car had been thrust aside and in the aperture appeared the dead Frenchman. His face was smeared with the yellow stain of gas, the eyes were open and glazed, the dropped jaw thrust forward on his chest. Stiffened fingers clutched the wrecked machine-gun which protruded beside him ready to be fired. In the dim light he stared at the Germans with a horrible and unwavering intensity. They stared back, not daring to move, their hands raised, the rope at their feet dropped from nerveless fingers. Hartley walked up to the officer and pulled the revolver from his belt. Then one by one he disarmed the other men, piling the guns and revolvers into the back of the ambulance. The Germans might have been lay figures so still they stood while he patted their pockets.

"All right, Joe," he called. "I've got 'em all."

"Keep your gun on the officer, Jim," came the voice from the ambulance.

Hartley moved closer. At once with a stiff jerk the body of the Frenchman disappeared and in its place was Oleson, a Luger in each hand, a rifle under his armpit.

"Tell 'em to pick up that rope," he commanded, "and pull the car back as planned.

The officer obeyed. The men stooped over the rope and drew the ambulance away from the bank.

"Now take this major guy on the seat with you, Jim, to show you the road to Mittlach. Drive with one hand and if he makes a false move plug him."

"You said it," Hartley answered with gusto, remembering his sick terror. "Forward march!"

Slowly the ambulance began to coast down-hill, held back by the reluctant Germans under the eye of Oleson.

"Are you all right, Jim?" his voice floated forward. "There's a reward of a thousand francs for this baby dead or alive, so don't be too fussy. We get ours any way he comes in."

"He's all right. I've got him sitting on his hands," Hartley called. "In five minutes they'll be so numb he won't be able to use them. A thousand francs! Oh, boy! We'll be paralyzed till the end of the war!"

"That voice," said the officer beside him. "But what of the French soldier with the machine-gun? I do not understand."

"You don't need to," Hartley told him pleasantly. "Two can play at ghosts as well as one. It's what we call a trap."

"A trap!" The major was furious.

"Don't wriggle so," Hartley advised him emotionally. "I've never shot a gun before and I may press the trigger too hard."

The face of the man beside him grew gray as the muzzle was pushed closer, but he only compressed his lips, not deigning to answer one who was only a common soldier.

And so the ambulance rolled on through the dim woods toward the lights of Mittlach, and safety.

Looking About

NOT so long ago Mr. Cox came in with the first sample of the new type of cover that went into effect with the "new" *Adventure* of October 23rd. We told each other we liked it, but for the most part we just sat and rejoiced comfortably and inaudibly. It was after hours and we could take our time about it.

And then it struck us that this first finished product couldn't mean to the average person anything worth more than a moment's consideration. Just some white and black letters on a plain blue field. Any fool could put them there. True enough, yet Cox and I knew how many hours and hours had gone into evolving that simple cover, how many people had had a hand in it, how many experiments had been made, how many discussions had arisen over how many details. Publishers, editors, artists, type experts, lawyers, the Post Office Department all had had their say. Yet there was nothing to show for all this except a few words of type on a plain field.

WE BEGAN to feel sorry for ourselves, for editors in general. We knew many people consider an editor's job very soft indeed. Nothing to do but sit around and read stories for a living. "But what does an editor do?" We realized that when we tried to answer that question specifically we found it difficult to assemble an array of duties that was at all impressive. And that made us feel more misunderstood and unappreciated than ever. A very sorrowful time was being had.

What the dickens do editors do? When we looked at that simple cover and reviewed all the time and work that had gone into it there seemed no logical conclusion except that we were a lot of futile old grannies frittering away our time on trivial details. How *could* such a thing have required so much fussing?

And then we began recalling some of the details we had fussed over. Gradually we began to feel better. However trivial they might seem to the average person we knew that any other editors would have fussed over them just as much—for the very good reason that generations of publishers and editors have found from experience that such details are very important when measured by practical results. Just another case of the technicalities of a trade or profession. The labors of every other trade or profession were just as unappreciated by those outside it. We emerged from our depression and began to feel as good as anybody.

AND presently Mr. Cox said: "It's funny, isn't it, the jargon artists and actors and such build up in connection with their work, while we editors haven't any jargon at all."

"Yes," said I.

And then we began to remember words like dingbats, foundries, unrush, widows, logotypes, fillers, blurbs, A. F., have-to-run, query-sheet, and so on and realized editors are just as full of jargon as the rest of 'em.

All of which is not important except in its indicating that even on our magazine, whose readers and editors meet on friendly footing, there's a little inner world most readers know little about. Of course you're welcome to know about it and, judging from questions asked and interest shown, readers do like to know about the "works" of magazines. The same fascination, I suppose, that things in print have for most of us, making some of us editors and some not.

So once in a while I might experiment by telling about some phase of the office work. If it interests, there's plenty more. If it doesn't, it's easy to stop.

ON THE way to the office I saw coming toward me a man so pitifully crippled that I instinctively began adjusting my gaze and general attitude so I should not appear to be either staring at him in curiosity or averting my eyes from something repulsive. But when we met I heard him singing to himself.

THE Reds tell us democracy is a mistaken idea. Italy, at the opposite extreme, dethrones it for a dictatorship. Our own intelligentsia, a bit inclined to sophomoric cynicism, tell us democracy has proved a failure. The politicians don't dare tell us that, of course, but their actions speak louder than words. The money powers say nothing, at least not openly. The rest of us, disturbed both by the condemning opinions and by the facts themselves, begin to wonder whether democracy is after all what the world wants to be safe for and, if it is, whether the world's chances of getting it are even fairly good.

There is no doubt about it, democracy is not so popular among us as it once was. Socialism, communism, Bolshevism undeniably grow stronger every day. On the other hand public power and private wealth undeniably center more and more into a few hands. Democracy is being ground between the upper and the nether millstones.

WE ORDINARY people see much that is wrong. Democracy seems not to be working out according to our forefathers' ideas. Public office is bought and sold in an almost open market. Graft rots its way through all our public machinery. The party system is openly advocated as more important than the choice of the best man for office and, less openly, as more important than democracy itself. Year by year we find our rights as individual citizens more and more proscribed and year by year we find we have less and less to say in the actual shaping of our public affairs, and find ourselves increasingly unfit to have a say in them. As for the Constitution it appears to be only something that can be interpreted into pretty much anything the lawyers and their employers choose.

No, things are not working out as we'd like. And the principle of democracy is being blamed.

That seems to me a very superficial judgment. Personally I believe it is not the principle of democracy but the application of that principle that is to blame. I still believe that successful government must be derived from consent of the governed and that democracy is the only possible machinery for full expression of that principle, no matter what ism the governed, by use of that machinery, may elect to follow.

BUT my opinion is not what is going to settle matters. What is going to determine the fate of democracy in this country, unless our form of government is to be dictated by others than ourselves—a possibility not so remote as most "good Americans" consider it—is the opinion of the American people as a whole, expressed and acted upon.

The air we breathe is full of theories and propaganda hostile to democracy or ignorantly destructive of it. Unless the body of the people form, express and act upon opinions that will uphold democracy against these assaults democracy will pass from among us.

You, I, the other fellow are the ones who compose the body of the people. The kind of casual thinking we've been doing on the subject has proved inadequate. Therefore we must think more carefully. What little action we have taken has been insufficient. Therefore we must act more efficiently.

IT IS obvious that if our thinking is to have practical result, our action to have effect, we must act not separately but together. Our magazine has worked out a plan for cooperation, and a general line on which to cooperate with due allowance for difference of opinion. I have nothing to say now about that plan except that it exists, that it is neither hasty of inception nor expected to cure everything by magic in a few months, and that it will be gradually presented to your judgment in "Looking About."

Any such plan merits your careful consideration if you are an American citizen or a Canadian, whose problems are to a large extent similar to our own. You are as interested a party as any one else and as much under obligation as any one else. You can not escape the fact that you are a citizen of a democracy and, being such, just as responsible as any other human being for the fate of that democracy.

SOME one has said that there is in one square inch of sod more than any human intellect can master. When I see, or hear, any one holding forth as very wise I think of a square inch of sod.—A. S. H.

A free-to-all Meeting-Place

The Camp

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship

SOME testimony as to the number of arrows that can be kept in flight at one time:

Lemmon, South Dakota.

I have just been reading in your issue of February 10th of a disbelief that an archer could have ten arrows in the air at one time and I will admit it looks quite impossible. But I am furnishing matter for a western history. Perhaps it will be called "Sixty-Seven Years of Plains Life," by G. E. Lemmon, and I am quoting Father and another participant in the great Oregon Indian war of about 1850 in declaring that a certain tribe of Indians who were affiliated with the Nez Perces, who carried their arrow-quiver bound solid, pointing over their left shoulder, could discharge their arrows so fast the string of arrows in flight presented the appearance of an eagle pointing at the target as he glanced back at it, or faced it, as the case might be. But Father and the other participant in the war agreed the arrows were not discharged with as much force or accuracy as those of a little slower discharge. Understand the main body of Indians that were fighting were the Nez Perces of Old Chief Joseph. But those fast arrow dischargers were of a smaller tribe affiliated with the Nez Perces.
—G. E. Lemmon.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Lawrence Rockwell rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

Born among the hills of Pennsylvania in 1888, I spent my early years in the "Northern Tier," as that district is called. An education dealing chiefly with foreign literatures has not dulled my interest in life and its portrayal in contemporary fiction. My later life has been by no means adventurous, though I have knocked about more or less in this country and abroad. I was lucky enough to be in Germany in August, '14, and was impressed by the American consul to bring a crowd of refugees through to

for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Fire

has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

London. I didn't get into the war, being one of the "sixty-day wonders" who were stranded in Plattsburg the fall of '18.

I have seen somewhat of Latin America and know it fairly well from literature, but "A Steady Job" is based on one of the yarns told me by a good friend who knows the country south of the Rio Grande like a book. I hope it has not suffered in my retelling of it.—Lawrence Rockwell.

ONE of our Camp-Fire comrades, E. J. Rollings, is the author of a booklet issued by The Narcotic Rehabilitation Society, 1907 Washington Boulevard Building, Detroit, Michigan. It is passed on to Camp-Fire almost in its entirety because of the extreme importance of its subject-matter. If any Prohibitionist can step forward and tell us why it is more important to stop the drink habit than it is to stop the dope habit, I wish he would do so. If any advocate of anti-weapon laws can step forward and tell us why it is more important to eliminate guns than to eliminate a chief cause of criminal use of guns, I wish he would do so.

FOREWORD

WE WHO tread the more respectable walks of life are wont to think of "the underworld"—in the infrequent moments when we think of it at all—as a remote and degenerate civilization, inhabited by those who have chosen their present mode of living to give expression to their own vicious instincts.

We forget those who, against their own better natures, have been dragged down—those who have been qualified by education, breeding, and heredity to live lives of accomplishment, of far-reaching influence for good.

Almost without exception, it is "dope" that has converted them into enemies of society—criminals, although eager to shake off their unhappy bondage. Helpless!

In the face of the almost inconceivable accomplishments of Christian civilization, this horrible menace persists—and increases. EVERY NEW DAY BRINGS TO OUR CIVILIZED WORLD ONE THOUSAND NEW DRUG ADDICTS!

Here, without question, is America's most serious problem. To face it squarely, to endeavor in a measure to check its headlong progress, should be the duty of the combined forces of church and government, of fraternal and social groups, of each and every upright citizen whose intelligence can grasp the sinister significance of its tightening grip.

"JUNK, JUNK PEDDLERS AND JUNKERS"

By E. J. Rollings

ONE of the most ghastly, loathsome and insidious "habit demons" in the world has built himself an American temple. To join his cult is to die a thousand torturing deaths, yet one million people in the United States have succumbed to the demon's deadly black arts, and others are joining the ranks at the appalling rate of *one thousand a day!*

The demon's name is "DOPE." His victims come from everywhere—*your girl or my boy may be next!* From the farms, from the small towns, from the city, from the best homes, the high priest of insanity and pain seizes his helpless subjects and crushes them under his inexorable heel. Men, women, boys and girls, many of them with the best of blood in their veins, go from the sunshine of the peaceful countryside into the night of pain, horror and disgrace.

The lawyer, the doctor, the business man, the preacher—no one is exempt!

When the great *Titanic*, broken open by an iceberg, carried a thousand lives to a watery grave, the world stood white and mute with horror; yet every day a thousand souls go down to worse than death, helpless victims of the powerful demon "DOPE."

Junk

"Junk" is the name applied by the underworld to Narcotic Drugs, Opium, and Cocaine, as well as to their derivatives, Morphine, Heroin, Yenche, Paragoric, Laudanum, etc. These drugs have a legitimate use for medicinal and experimental purposes; but used illegitimately they become the greatest curse upon mankind.

Morphine, a derivative of Opium, is the drug most commonly used, although the use of Cocaine is also very extensive. The use of Opium itself is not so prevalent, due to the fact that it requires an elaborate and expensive smoking outfit and a secluded room where windows and doors can be sealed to prevent the tell-tale odor from seeping out. The Morphine addict injects his "dope" by means of a hypodermic syringe. Failing to have a regular doctor's hypodermic syringe, the addict will manufacture his own.

For these reasons the average Opium smoker sooner or later becomes a Morphine addict. A Cocaine addict will always turn to Morphine also, because Cocaine robs him of sleep and leaves him in a highly nervous state, while Morphine promises quick relief and sleep. So he, too, is driven to "M," as it is called in the district.

Regardless of which drug habit an addict may form first, eventually he will become a Morphine victim. Morphine is the common and popular drug, derived from Opium.

World's approximate yearly Opium production	tons, 1500
Number tons used for medicinal purposes	125
Number tons sold illegitimately	1375

About 200 pounds of Morphine may be derived from one ton of Opium. Thus we see how Morphine is obtained in large quantities after the Opium "smoking demand" is satisfied:

Number tons Opium produced for illegitimate sale	1375
Number tons for illegal smoking purposes only	75
Tons left for Morphine manufacture	1300

200 pounds of Morphine derived from 1 ton of Opium.

1300 excess tons gives us:

260,000 pounds
4,160,000 ounces
1,996,800,000 grains
7,987,200,000 doses or "shots"

Seven billion, nine hundred and eighty-seven million, two hundred thousand doses or "shots."

These figures fairly stifle the imagination, and yet they are a pitiful actuality—and each day brings an even higher total.

Remember—this is just Morphine—we have said nothing about Cocaine and other narcotic drugs!

The immediate effect of dope is exhilaration or peacefulness, happiness in sleep or contented wakefulness, and relief from mental or physical pain. The ultimate result is a complete mental, moral and physical collapse, as well as theft, prostitution, misery beyond comprehension.

Junk Peddlers

Dope peddling has two outstanding features; it is the most vicious business known, and it is the most profitable.

The quantity of opium sold by the grower for $12 retails to the user on the streets for at least $7,000! No, this is not a misprint; just an unimaginable profit, warranted by an uncontrolable appetite, and collected by the most unscrupulous combine known.

It is estimated that the dope ring receives from Michigan addicts alone approximately $100,000 per day.

Do you remember the figures we looked at in the foregoing paragraphs? Two hundred sixty thousand pounds of morphine in excess of the amount required for legitimate purposes! This morphine is sold in ounce packages by the big peddler for $45 to $90 per ounce. The street peddler in turn makes his profit by putting it up in "checks" of about one-quarter grain, selling them to the addict for $1 each. These street peddlers make *from three to four hundred dollars on a single ounce.* Four hundred dollars an ounce profit on two hundred sixty thousand pounds! Use your pencil, and you will see why the dope ring attracts the most vicious criminals known to humanity.

Generally well educated, well-dressed, apparent ladies or gentlemen with unlimited funds at their command, dope traffickers have but one object in view: *Profit:* Not only do they supply the dope to present addicts, but in order to provide an ever-increasing market, they, by united and well-directed efforts, actually, intentionally and with all the vicious aforethought possible, create new addicts and keep them addicts!

This attack is largely directed at the youth of our country. Every possible effort is used to pervert the boy or girl of high school age into a potential addict for the coming years.

Increasing efforts are being made to enforce the narcotic laws. But these peddlers are so clever and shrewd that the making of a "case" requires hours, sometimes days, and often even weeks of tireless effort on the part of enforcement officers. Dope is peddled from houses, and under every conceivable blind, such as restaurants, soft drink parlors, shoeshine stands, taxicabs and from the pockets of street peddlers. Sometimes it will pass through four or five hands in getting from peddler to user. For these reasons it is very difficult to catch the peddler.

Some of our outstanding statesmen are endeavoring to suppress the growth, output and importation of dope. This means getting right to the source, it is the only way of entirely eliminating the evil. While this highly desirable end is a possibility during our generation, yet it is years distant. The present method of tirelessly fighting peddlers, big and little alike, must be kept up. Also, something must be done for the "Junker"; we can not take away his dope and leave him with a "habit."

Junkers

Now we arrive at the most interesting subject of this little booklet: the narcotic victim, who is known in the underworld, or in the "District," as a "Dope Fiend" "Doper" "Snow Bird" or "Junker."

How do they become drug users? Victims of circumstance; through mental or physical anguish, sorrow, despondency, loneliness, failure, or curiosity; sometimes war victims; sometimes the helpless recipients of overdoses through careless prescriptions.

All these causes sink into insignificance when compared with the tremendous growth in the illegal use of narcotics caused by the deliberate attempt of the Dope Ring to multiply its earnings through increasing the number of users.

First of all, you are interested in knowing what class of people become addicted to the use of drugs, and second, how they become users.

In the introduction to this article it has been stated that *no one is exempt*. It is altogether possible that the writer or the reader might become entangled in the meshes of this monster.

It is not true that drug addicts come from the ranks of morally, mentally and physically unfit. On the contrary, sons and daughters of men in high public office, university graduates, boys, girls, young men, young women, men and women of mature years with the blood of noted and noble ancestors in their veins—all are numbered in the one thousand that in a single day will become the slaves and playthings of the demon "DOPE," finally to go down to an anguished death in some dark hovel of the underworld, and to an unmarked grave.

Reports from one city show that 700 new addicts were developed amongst the school children in the second term of the last school year. Here one boy alone made addicts of thirty of his schoolmates!

Once a "Habit" is formed, it is not far from the top to the bottom of humanity's scale. Soon an addict becomes unable to work because of his physical condition. He *must* have dope; in fact, the average user must have from eight to ten dollars' worth of dope each day. This is the minimum amount required to prevent suffering. Then how is he to obtain money to buy dope?

The answer inevitably is, through every crime from panhandling to murder. Police Departments are flooded with requests for protection from the petty thief. *Nine-tenths* of this petty stealing is done by Dope Addicts! The majority of this number are criminals, not through choice but through necessity. They are unable to work, and they must have Dope, so they would sell their very soul or take your life without consideration, to obtain their required "Shot."

Here is a habit that can not be stopped by will power alone, like tobacco or liquor, where one suffers only mental discomfort. These addicts suffer real pain—intense, indescribable, excruciating; and physical pain as well as mental!

Yes, they can be cured. Cures are being effected now. But facilities are so limited that it is like trying to drain the ocean with a tin cup. But we will have more to say about this later.

I wish every reader could visit one of these "Hotels" or "Flop Houses," as they are called, where these unfortunates "hole in." These places to lie down cost but fifteen to thirty cents per night. As many as forty cots in one room are occupied mostly by "Junkers." There is no ventilation—a condition of squalor and filth that beggars description. Bed clothes have apparently never been washed. There are roaches, bedbugs, dirt and filth everywhere.

The majority of the occupants of these holes are boys in their 'teens or early twenties. Out of 23 questioned in one of these "flop joints," 14 were from farms or towns of less than 100 inhabitants, and 9 were war victims.

It was in a typical "Flop House" that we one night located "Charlie the Bum," after a half-hour search. There were some in our party who had heard of Charles O. Fallon, once a man of education, refinement and culture, but now reduced to the very depths of degradation through the use of Morphine. Through no fault of his own he had formed a "habit" and it had robbed him of position, home, wife, children, respectability, character and—well we had better let "Charlie" tell it. At our request he sat down and put on paper his innermost thoughts that night and it tells the story:

Up from the misty low lands
  Where the cotton blooms and grows
To the chilly northern country
  Where even men's hearts seem froze.

Away from the fragrant blue grass
  Away from the song birds sweet,
Up to the snow and the storm clouds
  Up to the ice and sleet.

Gone is my home and kindred
  Gone is the happy time,
Lost in the moiltering city
  Deep in its sin and crime.

Thoughtless and gay was the sowing
Far in the bygone years.
Brothers, the repentant harvest
Is sorrow and bitter tears.

Hopeless and old and broken,
Homeless, without a friend,
Toiling on to the sunset
And yearning toward the end.

Oh! God, when you scan the records,
Miss not the better part,
And when judging a wasted lifetime
Pity a broken heart!

Again, there is the story of Mary. Mary was born and raised in a small town. Her father, who was respected by every one in the community, died when Mary was quite young. Through the assistance of friends, Mary's mother secured the position of postmistress. Mary received a high-school education and six years of musical training.

Mary went to a large city for employment and ts many advantages. She married her childhood sweetheart as soon as he returned from the war. He had no job, but was confident of getting one. While in the army he had become a user of Morphine. He promised to quit, and he did as soon as they were married; but his abstinence lasted only a short time. Unable to find employment, he must have dope.

So with all the cunning aforethought which the drug instills, he soon taught his wife to use "just a little"—for all addicts have an insane desire to make addicts of others.

The inevitable followed. Mary became an addict. Soon she had to have dope, and the next step, with just a little encouragement from her husband, was the street. Things went from bad to worse until the husband's parents, who were in comfortable circumstances, came and took their boy away from "this terrible woman" he had married.

Mary was left on the street with nothing; that is, nothing but a habit. Mary was approached by a Negro dope peddler, who was attracted to Mary because she was white and good looking; and Mary was interested in him because he could supply her with the dope she required. A business arrangement was easily reached. One night they were arrested in his room. You know the rest.

These cases are not exceptions. They are typical.

Are we going to sit idly by and do nothing in the face of such facts?

A great number of these unfortunates *can be cured*. Are we, then, to do nothing because they can not *all* be cured?

Would you be willing to let all the passengers of a sinking vessel drown because it was possible to save only half of them?

The writer knows of many cures that have been effected by putting the patients into the psychopathic ward of hospitals for a week or ten days and then taking them to a farm where they could have wholesome food, fresh air, sunshine and light work to build them up.

The majority who had this opportunity made good. They occupy respectable places in society today. What could be done with the proper facilities? With a hospital located on a large farm away from the city where the cure and rehabilitation work could be successfully carried forth on a large scale?

Remember—
It might be your girl or my boy!

THINK this over. *For God's sake think it over!* The results of dope are tenfold worse than the results of liquor, a million times worse than all the damage done by guns in peace-time.

There may be argument as to whether prohibition is warranted as the right method of checking the liquor habit. There can be no possible argument against prohibition as the right and absolutely necessary method of checking the dope habit. The two cases are not parallel at all. Two reasons are sufficient to establish the fundamental difference. First, you can form the dope habit without knowing you are taking dope—one method of creating new addicts is to give it to them in candy or otherwise without their knowledge. Second, the habit can not be broken by will power alone—the victim ceases to be a free agent. It is not possible for any one to "take it or leave it alone." What in the case of liquor might be only a little experimenting or an occasional relaxation will in the case of dope spell death, mental, moral, physical death.

There is prohibition of dope now, but facts prove its inadequacy. Some of our Camp-Fire comrades are, as we know, among the enforcement officers. The dope evil is so infinitely more horrible than the drink evil that I think you'll find far less bribery, graft and treason among dope enforcement officers than among liquor enforcement officers. The weakness of present prohibition lies in the lack of public knowledge and interest. Secondarily, it lies in the hide-bound legislators and judges who keep the penalties for dope-peddling from even remotely approaching a severity commensurate with the damage to society.

Death or life imprisonment is the usual punishment for murdering one man, woman or child. In the case of your own son or daughter, wife or husband, brother or sister, or in the case of yourself, would you rather have the victim murdered quickly and cleanly by knife or pistol or murdered slowly, after first polluting and degrading him morally, mentally and physically, by dope?

Yet you punish the quick and clean murderer with death or life imprisonment, but allow the dope peddler to get off with a few years in prison.

Why not introduce a little logic and justice—and a little efficiency—into the situation?

Do not forget that *your own* son, daughter, brother, sister, wife or husband is just as likely as any other man's to be one of the thousand per day that will be seized upon some time next month, next year or this week.

Get on the job in your home town. Or take the consequences.

WHO ELSE at Camp-Fire can give us more information about this deadly gas against which gas-masks were of no avail? Larry Barretto, as he tells us in connection with his story in this issue, saw its effects with his own eyes and believes that, if the Armistice had not come when it did, it might have changed the outcome of the war. Why, then, did the Germans not use it? Surely the results of the experiments with it would have been known to the High Command. Why, with defeat imminent, didn't they use it? Couldn't be manufactured quickly in sufficient quantity, or what? The point would seem as important as one of the "decisive battles" of the world.

Who can tell us more about it?

New York City.

There is a basis of truth in this story. The Phantom Major was a very real and much feared person in the Vosges Mountains during the last weeks of the war. Provision trains and ammunition wagons strangely disappeared in those wilds never to be heard of again. I was at Lac Noir when the stretcher-bearer vanished into the night. There was a reward posted for the capture of this daring German officer, but I never heard that he was caught.

The gas attack occurred as I have written it. The men died in agony more horrible than anything I had ever witnessed, but the extraordinary thing was that masks were of no protection against the gas. Fully half the men who were brought in had gas-masks on, and none of them lived. I believe that this poison was a new invention and that if the Armistice had not been signed a few days later the Germans might have had a weapon which would have nullified all the Allied victories.

I was detailed to take the body of the man to Mittlach for autopsy. All the brakes on my car burned out as they did to *Hartley*, and I was escorted to the edge of the town, not by Germans, of course, but by a number of Senegalese who were by the roadside. When they left me some French soldiers harnessed an old gray horse to the ambulance and thus I drove ignominiously to the hospital.

I rather hope the Phantom Major escaped. To me he was one of the few really romantic figures in a war composed almost entirely of blood and mud.—LARRY BARRETTO.

TO MOST of us Americans Commodore Perry's visit to Japan was merely an event chronicled in school history, and most of us quite fail to appreciate the stupendous miracle Japan worked upon herself as a result of that visit. If Japan could do so much why can't we do a little miracle of our own and drive most of the graft and corruption from politics and government? Ah no, say you, we can't change human nature. And that particular argument is so particularly dumb and inapplicable that it generally just makes me sigh and walk away.

Miami Beach, Florida.

In "Camp-Fire" I read with much interest Mr. William A. Bowie's letter concerning Commodore Perry's notable action in Japan. Mr. Bowie may be glad to know that, even if Perry remains unsung in his own country, he is far from lacking honor in Japan. I make no attempt to give accurate information, but unless I am very much mistaken a shrine to Perry exists on the heights overlooking Mississippi Bay, near Yokohama, to which thousands of Japanese make pilgrimages every year, honoring Perry among their famous ancestors, as having opened up their country to communication with the world, resulting in the overthrow of the Shogunate and the establishment of the golden Meiji reign.

Few people know that Japanese, settled in Seattle, financed a trip to Japan in 1918 of the sole survivor of Perry's expedition, a sailor named Hardy, in order that honor might be done him. I was in Tokio when he arrived and witnessed a demonstration that thrilled me. The streets were decorated and huge crowds lined up to see him. He was received by the Mikado at his Chrysanthemum Party, and then wined, dined and fêted by the nobility for months. Incidentally I had the pleasure of meeting him. He was, I think, about 80 years old, a typical old tar, and did not seem to know what it was all about, except that he was having the time of his life.

ONE of your writers' brigade should certainly give us stories of Old Japan. How many people know that seventy-five years ago there existed a nation, living under feudal laws closely resembling those of the middle ages in Europe? Today Japan is a nation with all the freedom, education, industry and commercialism of America. Where men, born coolies, are the equivalents of our Morgans and Carnegies. Where every schoolboy learns English and plays baseball and tennis. But a few years ago the Mikado was the only spiritual head, and the Shogun ruled by might and force the lesser leaders (whose titles I forget) each of whom had his castle walled and moated and manned by the Samurai, who compare with our European knights. They compare so closely, in fact, that they wore armor, and honor with them came first. They fought in the lists both for honor and for love, and, like their counterparts of the middle ages, built wonderful shrines and temples and fostered art and literature.

A wealth of material exists within easy reach, as

English translations of histories, legends, ancient customs, etc., are plentiful, and it is even possible to get information from living sources. Many Japanese now living were under the old influence in their youth, and some of these descendants of the Samurai can even be found in New York where they are connected with large Japanese houses that have branches there.

In closing might state that Miami Beach may possibly be only a temporary residence.—F. S. CARR.

WHEN we in the office read the manuscript of "Jukes" it seemed impossible that a man should drop forty feet without injury, so we asked Bill Adams about it. His reply follows:

Modesto, California.

I think that this might make a suitable subject for discussion at Camp-Fire. I gave it some careful thought. Possibly not quite careful enough. But I decided that it was by no means impossible for a first-rate and thoroughly agile sailor such as *Jukes* to drop forty feet and land upon his feet unharmed. My decision was reached because I remember that on a Glasgow barque called the *Balmore* (she lay just ahead of my ship in port for some weeks once) a young ordinary seaman on his way aloft fell from close under the futtocks and landed on the deck in a sitting posture. He sat there a moment, then rose to his feet and in a somewhat dazed manner climbed back into the rigging and started aloft again. The mate swore at him, and ordered him down; telling him that he was a blanked fool to start up again; that he ought to be blank blank glad that he was alive, and that he'd better find out if his blank blank neck wasn't broken before he began going up again. He was, however, quite unhurt.

Now if a no-account young cuss of an ordinary seaman could fall by accident from the futtocks, which would be more than forty feet up, a first-rate man such as *Jukes* ought to be able to judge his drop and drop forty feet without hurt. Possibly I give him too long a drop. Yet, I think not. Forty feet isn't much to a man who spends a large part of his time hanging on by toenails and eyebrows a hundred and seventy feet above the deck. I would suggest leaving it as is and asking the opinion of the old windjammer men who read "Camp-Fire." I'm sure some of them will have fallen that far. Why, I remember a foremast hand who swore he once fell from the topgallant yard to the keelson when the ship was empty and the hatches off. All he got was one broken finger. He was a liar, of course. But forty feet is not far to a sailor. I don't think. *Jukes* was a *sailor*, and he judged his drop.—BILL ADAMS.

HERE'S a pleasant little method of taking a gun away from a hold-up successfully—if you succeed:

—— County, Missouri.

Say, can I join the Camp-Fire for a few minutes? I got a little note I wanta howl—moreover—dang it I need room to talk and—run.

NOW there seems to be a feller who thinks that none of these waddies would buck a six-gun when a peevish li'l' guy is on the pointing end. Now this here author feller wrote a danged good reply, but *I* would like to bulldog a li'l' myself. This feller says that a gun was made to hold onto; I dunno but that is what I always use the handle for. I am one of the deputies around these here parts and I have not had any tuff guys to handle outside of Messrs. Colbuck, Robinson, Smith, etc., etc., and I personally saw one of these juggers jerk a beater from a copper's hand and what I mean the deputy was *sore*.

Now I'll tell you some more and you can try it out at your own sweet time and it's dead easy. You can take a cocked pistol away from a man with very little danger to your own anatomy, and nine out of ten times I can do it before he pulls the trigger. Now, brothers, that is one —— of a broad statement but it is so easily done that it seems childish. Whether the jugger that's got the cannon is sore or not. Now actually try this out before you rope and brand me because I know whereof I speak. You stand with your hands elevated and when said pistol gets within reaching distance use your right hand and grasp muzzle, push downward and continue until the gun is in the back of said bad boy. Now try this two or three times and see how really easy it is, will yuh? I made you sore, I guess, but all I'll say is try it.

You can also do it like this. If parties take gun in right hand use your left and jerk the gun to your left—opponent's right—and it will come away very nicely. If you practise with your friends be careful with this last one because you might break his trigger finger. Now, of course, if you can't do your stuff it is up to you to get within reaching distance. I personally use a 32-20 Frontier Model Colts S. A., and it has about ½ or ¾ pound pull and I can do that little thing with it. Now I am going to pound some leather before these guys jump on me and I'll say adios. Well, I'm not gonna give yuh my name, 'cause somebody might bushwhack me and I shore am careful about *me*. If you see comrade W. J. Coburn tell 'im he can call on me any time. Now I hope I described the method plain enough to my pards and it might come in handy some time. Well, fellers, I gotta go to town tomorrow, so I'm gonna turn in.—PAT.

I passed the letter on to Donegan Wiggins of AA and here is his comment:

Salem, Oregon.

Yes, the gentleman is perfectly correct; he is just simply copying the famous trick of the Marines in disarming an antagonist. I may add that I can't think of a better way to commit suicide than to try this on a man really expert in the use of his guns.—WIGGINS.

ANOTHER instance from history that bears out an incident in a story by Georges Surdez. You will remember that Mr. Surdez cited several instances in the French service.

Santa Monica, California.

The article in May number of *Adventure*, on Lieut. de Latour being led into action by two black sergeants after he was dead. It has happened that men, killed very suddenly in battle, have been carried by their horses into the conflict. The well-known case of Captain Nolan of the British army proves this.

During the Crimean War, 1854-55, fought by England, France, Italy and Turkey against Russia, an order was given by the British commander-in-chief that the Light Brigade, some 600 strong, should charge the Russian Batteries, which were doing terrible damage to British and French troops. As subsequent investigations proved, the order, as it was received by the commander of the Light Brigade, Lord Cordigan, was recognized by him as an error, but orders are orders and, remarking, "Here goes the last of the Cordigans," that gallant officer caused the charge to be sounded and off they went into the valley of shot and shell. Which caused the French general to utter the memorable words "*Il est magnifique; mais il ne pas la guerre.*" Leading his squadron was one Captain Nolan, aide-de-camp to the commander-in-chief and, if I remember rightly, the officer who brought the order to charge the Russians, but somehow got it wrong. This officer early in the charge was struck by a piece of shell and instantly killed. At the moment of death his right arm was raised aloft, holding his sword, and it is well known in medical and surgical history that "rigor mortis" occurred so instantaneously that he remained upright in the saddle, his sword in his raised arm, until his horse, which had ridden through the carnage untouched, fell and threw him off, in the confusion of reforming after the charge for the ride back to the British lines.—G. R. Radmore.

RECENTLY we inaugurated the custom of having the biography of one of our writers at the end of each "Camp-Fire," so that all readers may come to know personally our old writers as well as those who join us as we go along. This time it's W. C. Tuttle.

I TAKE special pleasure in spreading his past before all eyes. Some years ago, when his stories were primarily humorous and partook generously of amusing farce, Westerners with a literal turn of mind rather regularly wrote in complaining that he didn't know his West, and was just another of those Easterners who portrayed a West that never existed—never was a cowboy acted like those in his stories. No one knew that last any better than Mr. Tuttle himself, or was more familiar with the material he twisted and bent to suit his own whimsical humor. At that time he had never been east of Montana. And he was born and raised among cowboys when cowboys *was* cowboys.

One of his most remarkable characteristics, from the view-point of an editor, is that he will positively not "talk shop" unless absolutely forced into it. He'll talk about anything else, he'll play bridge, poker or golf, he's accommodating in every other way, but he won't talk shop if he can squirm out of it. Not talking shop is almost a vice with him.

His weakest spot is ducks—gun or fork. He admits possessing altogether too many shotguns for one man to use but, like his forks, he uses only one of them at a time.

And—he lives in Hollywood. But I have hopes of luring him to the hills and lakes and woods of Putnam Co., N. Y., in spite of his hobby for "poking into the desert" as he calls it.

As to his personal appearance I'd rather let him say it:

"Am forty-two years of age; nearly bald; weight, 145; stand five feet ten and three-quarter inches tall; not so handsome as I was when a child, but very cheerful. Hate only two people. One invented razors, the other neckties. Haven't worn a hat for seven years."

As to the hat I can't say, but I've seen him under a cap. It should also be stated, not at all in this connection, that he's rather a crank on all kinds of fishing and hunting. If you think his reticence about his own writing is generally characteristic of him, mention quail or deep-sea fishing to him. If you have any doubts as to why a vein of humor runs through all his stories, mention anything to him. He exudes humor and good-humor, making both infectious. Even in telling you about him, if I can't be humorous I have to be at least—cheerful.

He wrote down for me the general outline of his experiences. Here it is:

"Was born in Montana, son of one of the old gun-men sheriffs. Up to the age of twenty I lived in the cow country and saw much of it shift from open range to barbed-wire. Was in a position to get much first-hand knowledge of sheep and cattle troubles, and was able to understand the mental attitude of both sides. Rode bad horses—mostly by accident—and herded sheep.

"Trapped and hunted wolves and coyotes for a living. Worked on Forest Reserve before Civil Service. Worked at both placer and quartz mining; cooked for crews on big ranches and did 'most everything there was to do in the open country. Went to a cow-town school until I outgrew the benches. Did not get a high-school education. Wasn't any such animal.

"Was in Portland, Oregon, from winter of 1902 until July of 1906. Worked as a harness and saddle salesman, played semi-pro baseball, sold cigars, ran a gambling house, worked on both ends of a street car, money clerk for Northern Express Company. Went back to Montana and worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad at Missoula. Took a job as cartoonist for *Daily Missoulian*. Drifted into Bitter Roots and became a bookkeeper for a fruit association. Left there in 1908 and headed for the Coast. Went broke in Spokane and took a job on Spokane *Daily Chronicle*, as cartoonist. Stayed there ten years, got married, started writing fiction for *Adventure*.

"Moved to Hollywood, California, in 1918—and I'm here yet."

Five of his books have been published in England (all appeared originally in our magazine) and the Century Company brought out his "Reddy Brant." His "Quien Sabe" was included in "Sixteen Best Stories of 1926," The George H. Doran Company, his "Alias Whispering White" in "Adventure's Best Stories for 1926," by the same book house.

Many of his stories have been filmed and through him most of us have met old *Adventure* friends on the screen. Universal, for example, has filmed ten of his Piperock stories and is filming twelve more.

He is one of the "old timers" of our writers' brigade and *Hashknife* and *Sleepy* have become as real to us as were their originals in real life to him. Older readers will remember that he has had to draw their pictures for Camp-Fire, fill in the gaps in their hypothetical lives, answer various questions about them. *Hashknife* and *Sleepy* are members of Camp-Fire in the best of standing.—A. S. H.

Ask

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

General Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere

STRAIGHT

A News Bulletin of Outdoor Equipment

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World

Trapping

WHEN the expert is forced to tell an inquirer that the plan asked about is impracticable he is often able to suggest an alternative plan—as has been done below.

Request:—"I would like to get some information on trapping in Arkansas.

Is there any good trapping in the mountains?

About what would a one-man outfit cost?

Would it be advisable to have a coon dog? About how many traps and what kind would be best? I have trapped coon and skunk in Texas and can take care of myself in the woods.

When would be the best time to go?"—PAUL SHAW, Houston, Texas.

Reply, by Mr. Thompson:—I feel sure you can not make a living by trapping in the mountains of Arkansas, but if you go up White River above Cotter or the tributary of White called Buffalo, you can make expenses both by trapping and having a good coon dog with you. I would not counsel running over twenty-five traps for mink, coons, etc. It is possible you will find an empty shanty there and save bringing along a tent. Of course you can get a cooking outfit of the small sort cheap, so an outfit and grub ought not cost more than two hundred dollars.

Better go there and look over the country for a location before you determine on a place in a haphazard fashion. You ought soon get a line on your grounds by finding where most signs are.

Radio

SOME facts about portable sets. How far a set costing around one hundred dollars will receive under favorable conditions, with suitcase sets compared to the more rigid ones made of wood.

Request:—"Would you please give me a little information on radio—portable sets—to be carried as suitcase about 25-28 pounds in weight, dry-cell batteries, loop aerial, built-in loud speaker. Desire a set—not coast to coast—but one to receive on

Adventure

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Verdicts by Experts on the Authenticity of Current Non-Fiction

GOODS

and Commodities Tested by Our Experts

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

speaker in neighborhood of eight hundred miles or so—one with very good reception for that distance. $100 to $125 in price. How many tubes should set of this kind require? I do not care for great distance but prefer music and reports closer and more distinctly." — MICHAEL J. STEINER, West Fir, Oregon.

Reply, by Mr. McNicol:—I have tried a good many portable hook-ups and containers, but have arrived at the conclusion that the best portable set is a regular wood box set, as used for ordinary purposes.

Suitcase outfits look all right in theory but they are not rigid enough. A wood box outfit with tubes inside and with only the dials on outside answers very well. I use one of these and have for it a rain-proof covering which may be pulled on and off like a sock.

For less than $100 you can buy any one of the five-tube sets complete with dry cells. Two stages of radio frequency, detector and two stages of audio amplification, would reach out five hundred miles under fair conditions. The same set with an outdoor antenna fifty feet high and one hundred feet long should reach one thousand miles, unless the receiving location is poor.

It would be best if you could negotiate for a set in your own territory, rather than in the east.

Sailing

THE expert who speaks below once sailed a boat single-handed from New York to Bermuda, so he should know what he is talking about when he advises these readers who want to sail down the Mississippi and out to the open sea.

Request:—"The following may strike you as a foolish as well as hazardous undertaking on the part of two young men who possess only a limited knowledge of seamanship. We have just about enough nerve to try it. Although our funds would not necessitate the buying of a pack-mule to lug it around, we believe we have enough for the purpose.

We will not leave until the summer or early fall of 1927.

Our plan in brief is this: We propose to buy a sailing vessel somewhere up here in the vicinity of the Great Lakes, slide down the Mississippi in it to New Orleans. From New Orleans sail to Cuba and the West Indies, then to Panama; through the Canal into the Pacific and across to the Galapagos Islands, to the South Sea Islands, New Zealand and Australia. If all goes well by the time we reach Australia, we shall continue all the way around until we get back home.

The information we most desire just now is:

1. What type of a sailing vessel would you advise us to take for a trip of this sort: length, width, depth, draft, etc.?

2. Under what sections of the navigation laws would an undertaking of this nature fall?

3. Can you give us an idea of the amount and nature of 'red tape' we will be obliged to go through before we can legally embark upon a trip of this sort?

4. Charts, maps, etc., we should take along and where can we get them?

5. Can you give us the address of some firm dealing in mariners' supplies in the vicinity of Chicago?

6. Supplies we should take along in the line of food, clothing, amount of water, etc.?

7. What do you think of the course outlined herein, and which we are intending to follow? Do you think it is O.K.? If not, what course would you follow?

I have a number of other questions of minor importance which I would like to ask, but will not trouble you with them.

Any other information or advice will be highly appreciated."—E. H. Himanka, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Capt. Dingle:—I don't know everything about boats, but I do know that any small craft at once shallow enough to traverse the Mississippi from end to end and seaworthy enough to go to sea will have to be a freak such as I have no knowledge of. So if you really mean to make the entire trip—which seems to me to be the dream of an utterly impracticable landsman knowing nothing of the sea and its requirements—I can not suggest any vessel, because as I have remarked I know of no type of boat which could navigate a shallow river and the open ocean with safety. For the sea end, I would suggest (for two non-experts) a short-rigged schooner or ketch, forty feet long, ten or twelve beam, and six to seven draft.

You can sail as a yacht, under yachting clearance, if you do not trade or carry passengers for hire. If you do, you lose your yacht privileges and must take out full merchant vessel papers. For a boat that size, navigated by yourself, you need no license.

There need be no red tape. Simply go to the Custom House at the port of departure and ask for clearance. It may not be necessary. They'll tell you. The port doctor will give you a bill of health, which will be necessary in any case if sailing foreign.

Get charts and necessary books at any nautical bookseller in any port. Near the Custom House anywhere. Get whatever charts that cover the seas you propose covering. A nautical almanac and light lists. Room 528, Post Office Building, Chicago, is where you can get almost everything you need. Ask them for their catalog.

I can not undertake to give you an inventory of food and supplies. I don't know how much cash you have; what you can live on; what you are willing to endure; or how many there will be. You must allow at least half a gallon of water per man per day, and give yourselves plenty of drift for overlong passages.

If you can live on salt meat, dried fish, and preserved vegetables with hard biscuit, you will require a minimum of one pound of biscuit, one pound of meat, and half a pound of dried fish per man per day for the expected duration of any passage.

Vegetables are heavily compressed and a few ounces are enough for a day. Rice is good to carry too, but bulky. You can't carry potatoes very long in a small boat. They need ventilation and picking over often. If your funds are ample, you can carry a lot of canned stuff which stows well. It's expensive grub though.

Clothing. You need what you would take camping. Good slicker, rubber boots, good sweater, woolen shirts besides thin cotton stuff. (Yes, it can be cold even on the Equator, on wet nights when it's blowing.)

As for what I think of the course you propose, if you are able to take a boat anywhere at all, this course is as practicable as any. It is only your cool supposition that the same boat that can go around the world can navigate the shallows and shifting bars of the upper Mississippi that makes me wonder if you know what you are doing.

Luck to you anyhow.

Lake Superior

HOW does one avoid catching cold in this chilly country? By keeping almost uncomfortably cool—or so the old mushers say. But here are some more specific directions.

Request:—"I am going up near Lake Superior to trap this winter and will appreciate it very much if you will answer the following questions for me.

What diseases and sickness will we be liable to find? What is the best way to prevent these and what should be done if they are contracted? What should a first-aid kit contain for two men?

This will be our first time on the trail and any information you might think advisable to send will be greatly appreciated."—Floyd McAtee, Toledo, Ohio.

Reply, by Dr. Fordyce:—Avoiding catching "colds" which might lead to pneumonia and proper winter diet are the main things you should look out for on your winter trip. Equipping properly is perhaps more essential in winter work than in any other type of active outdoor life unless it be tropical travel. Wool clothing and sleeping-bag is the answer to proper body insulation and warmth.

A regulation clothing equipment would be to wear two suits of light wool undersuits—one larger than the other, wool lumbermen's socks, cruiser's packs with rubber feet and leather tops, outer clothing of mackinaw—pants and coat, fur cap, mittens, wool shirt.

A wool sleeping-bag can be made at home by making a quilt of a wool batt (6 pounds) and a denim cover; this is slipped within an Army shelter cloth cover or bag which is waterproofed on the bottom only. Make the bottom of the quilt double thickness of wool from hips to shoulders to act as a bed pad (you must have twice as much beneath as over you).

Owing to the lack of fresh vegetables and fruits on winter trips it will pay you to take in a supply of dehydrated fruits and vegetables, desiccated egg, and powdered milk.

Guard against constipation or anything which lowers your resistance and makes colds liable. When in active exertion guard against perspiring if possible; then when you stop to rest pile on outer coat. Mushers in the Far North advise keeping almost uncomfortably cool to guard against sweating and then it's chilling or freezing. Horace Kephart's book on "Camping and Woodcraft" will give you many pointers on winter life and also has a chapter on first aid. I am sending you herewith a circular on the first-aid kit which I recommend.

Cavalry

HARD fighting was experienced by this branch of the service in Africa, Mesopotamia and other places during the war, although the fact may not be generally realized.

Request:—"I would like to know the requirements that a man has to pass to join the U. S. Cavalry. The following are a list of questions that I would be pleased if you would answer.

1. What about the age restrictions?
2. What is the pay?
3. Is there much chance of promotion?
4. What kind of arms do they carry?
5. What chances of battles are there in the cavalry compared with the infantry? I don't want to enlist in anything that don't fight."—JAMES GRAHAM, National City, Cal.

Reply, by Lieut. Townsend:—(1) Age limits for enlistment in the cavalry, as in other branches of the United States Army, are 18 to 35 years for original enlistments. Youths between the ages of 18 and 21 years must secure the written consent of parent or guardian before they will be accepted.

(2) The pay of a private in the Army is $21.00 per month. You should not compare that with pay in civil life, however, because in addition to your *cash* pay the Army provides every enlisted man with good food, clothing, comfortable quarters, and medical treatment when necessary, besides many opportunities for amusement and recreation which cost real money in civil life. Counting the value of these allowances the pay of a private in the army is the equivalent of from $75.00 to $100.00 per month in civil life. The cash pay is really a soldier's spending money because all of his necessities except toilet articles and laundry are furnished for him by the Government. Promotion carries with it higher pay and in the higher grades increased allowances also. Then you should not overlook the fact that every soldier who serves the flag honestly and faithfully for thirty years can retire with pay. This retired pay for the average enlisted man is approximately $100.00 per month which is equal to six per cent. interest on $20,000. Comparatively few men after thirty years work in civil life have $20,000 to provide them with an income for the remainder of their lives.

(3) There is good opportunity for promotion in the Army. Promotion depends largely upon the man himself. There is usually a shortage of first-class non-commissioned officer material and capable men often are advanced to corporal or sergeant on their first enlistment; in some cases to even higher grades. For a steady man who works, studies and has the ability there is really no limit. Major-General Harboard, who was Chief of Staff before his retirement a few years ago, began his Army career as a private in the cavalry and won his way to the top without pull or preference other than that given him by his own ability and hard work. There are many high ranking officers in the Army who began as enlisted men. Every year examinations are held by which qualified enlisted men are selected for appointment as officers.

(4) The principal weapons of the cavalry are the saber, the pistol, the automatic or machine-rifle and the machine-gun.

(5) I think your opportunity to see active service is as good in the cavalry as in any other branch of the Army. I am an infantryman, myself, but we doughboys have a great deal of repect for the yellowlegs. It is true that the cavalry was at a disadvantage in the trench fighting of the World War, but cavalrymen saw a lot of hard service and fighting in Africa, Mesopotamia and other places. The next war, if we have one, is likely to be fought on entirely different lines than the trench warfare in France. So far as the possibility for action is concerned I am sure you will make no mistake in joining the cavalry.

In conclusion I want to say that in the Army, as in other worth-while occupations, your advancement will depend mostly on yourself. Loafers and gold brickers are not wanted. They sometimes get in but usually do not last long. The great majority of the enlisted men, and especially of the non-commissioned officers, are sober, industrious men of excellent character. If you feel that you can make good among men of that class and still want to get in the cavalry, you should look up your nearest recruiting officer who can give you all necessary information about stations that are open, etc. You can probably enlist for the 11th Cavalry which is stationed at the Presidio of Monterey right there in California, one of the fine cavalry regiments in Texas, or the 13th Cavalry at Fort D. A. Russell, Wyo., or one of several other regiments which the recruiting officer can tell you about. You can enlist for one or three years. The three-year enlistment is advised because it takes that long at least, to make a cavalry man and for you to learn whether the Army is going to suit you as a life job. Even if it doesn't suit you I am sure you will not feel the time has been wasted.

South Africa

A LAND which has a future and which holds out a warm welcome for men of character who have had sound experience in sheep or cattle raising.

Request:—"I wish to get in touch with some large cattle or sheep outfit in South Africa, with the view to securing employment.

I am thirty-two years of age, married, with two boys. My wife was born and raised on a stock ranch in California. I, myself, will graduate in Animal Husbandry at the University of California this coming summer, and have a ten-year experience on stock ranches throughout Nevada, California and Arizona, *before* coming to the Agricultural College."—John Cinek, Davis, Calif.

Reply, by Capt. Franklin:—I am sorry that I can not put you in direct touch with any cattle or sheep people in South Africa, but men of your type are received with "open arms" in that country. There is only one thing to do, in my mind, and that is to go out there, and obtain employment on one of the large sheep farms. In the meantime, you can look around and have time to place yourself to the best advantage. Good sheep men are scarce in South Africa.

If you will write a letter to the Secretary of the Agent-General for South Africa, Trafalgar Square, London, England, stating your case, he may know of some one, where an opening could be obtained. In the meantime, I have given your name and address to the Editor of the *American Sheep Breeder*, who is a personal friend of mine.

Our experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Cover Your Ground**—Make questions definite. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

Turkey and Asia Minor
Europe. In Seven Parts
South America. In Three Parts
Central America
Mexico. In Three Parts
Canada. In Nine Parts
Alaska
Baffinland and Greenland
Western U. S. In Six Parts
Middle Western U. S. In Five Parts
Eastern U. S. In Ten Parts
The Sea. In Three Parts
Islands and Coasts. In Three Parts
New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
Australia and Tasmania
Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
New Guinea
Philippine and Hawaiian Islands
Asia. In Five Parts
Africa. In Eight Parts
Fishing, Salt and Fresh Water
Canoeing
Motor Boating
Motor Camping
Motor Vehicles
Shotguns
Rifles
Edged Weapons
First Aid on Trail
Health
Mining and Prospecting
Forestry in the United States
Tropical Forestry
Railroading in United States, Mexico and Canada
Aviation
Army Matters
Navy Matters
State Police
Horses
Photography
American Anthropology North of Panama
Herpetology
Entomology
Stamps
Coins
Radio
Track
Tennis
Basket ball
Bicycling
Skating
Skiing and Snow Shoeing

ADVENTURE'S TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

A Service Organization with Stations and Experts all over the World

THERE were two ways in which we could have started the *Adventure* Travel Association. One was for us of the staff to organize and build it up according to our own ideas and then present it to you full-fledged and finished. The other way was for us to plan its general features and then say "Here's an outline for what we believe can be made a very big thing. Since it's for your benefit and convenience, and since we like to work with our readers, not apart from them, let's get together on this outline and change and develop it to fit your needs and wishes exactly and become the most perfect thing of its kind that can be made."

We chose this last way. In the October 23 issue we gave you the general outline, asking your cooperation, and within a few days of this writing letters of suggestion should begin reaching us.

Meanwhile, of course, we've not been idle. We've been interviewing steamship and railway companies, travel agencies and various other travel factors that are likely to be involved. As we work out with them the cooperation that seems practical between them and us we'll report to you.

At all stages of development keep giving us your suggestions and criticisms. We want you not only to benefit from the A. T. A. but to have a hand in building it from the very start.

How does the following seem to you as a basis of membership?

Since it is going to take some time to perfect our machinery, make no charge for dues until the A. T. A. is actually delivering benefits that warrant many times over the payment of membership dues. Let us say, no charge through the remainder of 1926 and all through the year 1927. At no time make the dues more than nominal in comparison with the service rendered. In the meantime extend a guest membership, free of charge, to any reader of our magazine, issuing guest-cards that will entitle him to all the privileges and benefits of a regular membership. When he comes home he'll know from practical personal experience whether permanent membership in the A. T. A. isn't worth many times whatever annual dues may be charged.

As at present planned, no one can become a permanent member until he has taken out, and used, a guest membership and has turned in to us a report on the kind of service he experienced from hotels, transportation lines and other travel factors. By this method we prevent any one's becoming a member of A. T. A. who has not to our definite knowledge qualified as a traveler and we create a system that will always enable us to give members up to date reports on treatment and service received, to strike from our recommended list any hotel, pension, transportation line or other travel factor that does not keep up to the high standard of treatment we shall demand for our members, and to take up with the proper authorities, whether commercial or governmental, any general travel problem that actual experience has proved needs consideration and adjustment.

The only part of the plan as now outlined on which we stand as an absolute essential is fortunately one we're entirely sure none of you will want omitted—the establishment of our own A. T. A. stations all over the world. The unanimous verdict of all travelers interviewed is that the thing most needed by travelers is reliable and comprehensive information, local as well as general. There is only one way to furnish that—local stations.

Establishing such stations in sufficient number and of sufficient efficiency is a problem that no organization has yet been able to work out. A. T. A. can and will do it. We know it can because our magazine has had hundreds of its own local stations for years and knows what can be done.

These A. T. A. stations must be kept by intelligent, well informed and entirely reliable business houses or individuals. They must put at our members' disposal all possible local information of value or interest to travelers. They must keep on hand, or direct to, all printed information from local sources.

With the help of our Art Department we've worked out the emblem for the A. T. A. that appears here. The T will be red, the remainder black. If you have a better one, send it in. In the meanwhile we'll rally around this one.

The A. T. A. emblem on a window or door in Minnesota will mean that there's a man there who can tell you where the fishing is good, how to get there, what equipments you need. "A. T. A." on a window in Italy means that the English-speaking station keeper will help you to cash checks, give you information on hotels, tell you about the points of interest in his locality. "A. T. A." anywhere—from South America to Alaska and from China to Europe—indicates a link in a world-wide chain of stations that *Adventure* is now establishing as parts of a new association which will embrace every factor of travel—from steamship and railroad facilities to books, travel and sports equipment. A later issue will carry the list of new stations now being organized. We hope soon to add a thousand to the two hundred and eighty already in existence. And that's just starting.

Our other Service Departments—"Books You Can Believe," "Straight Goods" and the "Questions and Answers" section of "Ask Adventure" will coöperate fully with A. T. A. stations in giving as complete a service as is possible to members.

That's our report to date. Now turn to and help us build A. T. A. into a live club of congenial friends interested in travel, in seeing the great places of the earth and snooping into out-of-the-way corners, in understanding and developing friendship with the people of foreign countries, in pushing out the walls of narrow interests to get a glimpse of the world beyond.

A News Bulletin *of Outdoor Equipment and Commodities*

STRAIGHT GOODS

TESTED BY OUR EXPERTS

SHINY and efficient looking they are placed before you. It may be rifles you are buying, or fishing tackle, a pair of binoculars or a camp kit for the car. Which will you choose? They all have good features; but which is the rifle, for instance, that will exactly answer your purpose and upon which you can depend for good service? Among four or five brands you will find perhaps two stamped with the seal illustrated here, an arrow with the words "Straight Goods—Tested and Passed by *Adventure.*" And that's your guide.

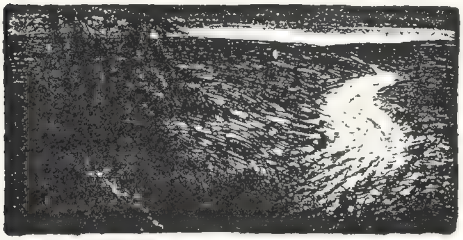
Adventure experts living in every corner of this country and abroad, thoroughly equipped to try out equipment in their fields, are testing products for us and giving impartial reports to be published in *Adventure*, telling our readers how they tested the commodity, what features they found most valuable, with hints on how to use and care for the equipment to secure the best service. Whether or not a commodity is advertised in *Adventure* does not affect the impartiality of the test or reports. Recommended products may be marked by the manufacturers with the stamp furnished by the magazine.

As the experts report on the products they are testing, our list of recommended goods will be formed. This list, as well as the comments of the Ask Adventure men, will appear in the department and several times a year will be issued in booklet form so that you may have them as permanent reference lists.

In this department too, as well as in all other Ask Adventure divisions, we are anxious to get our readers' suggestions. Let us know what type of equipment interests you, what you would like to see tested, and your experiences with various products. It helps to get your slant on the idea, and your requests for information on certain types of equipment will guide us in selecting the products to be tested.

Lost Trails

We offer this service free of charge to readers who wish to get in touch with old friends from whom the years have separated them. All inquiries of this sort received by us, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with the inquirer's name. We reserve the right, in case the inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and in general to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name when possible. Give also your own full address. We will forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal Star *to give additional publicity in their "Missing Relative Column" weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to another are barred. Full lists of those unfound are reprinted semiannually.*



ROSENBERG, LEO. Came to New York in 1912 from Roumania. Wife's name, Minna Tcherniafsky. Please write to your son.—Address CHARLES ROSENBERG, 20 Rue de Paris, Tientsin, China.

LANDRY, JAMES EDWARD. Age 39, formerly of Everett, Mass. Last heard of in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1918. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. PHILOMENA LANDRY, 483 Waltham St., West Newton, Mass.

TRAVERSY, A. J. Called "Bert." Left home in Marble, Minn, in January, 1926. Age 40, height about 6 ft.; black hair, bald on top; fair complexion, rather heavy set. "Bert" write Corrine, your sister, in G. B., Wis., for particulars. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write MRS. A. J. TRAVERSY, 431 Garfield St., Hibbing, Minn.

POLLEY, JAS. J. Last address 947 W. 6th St., Los Angeles, Calif. "Remember jail incident Progresso?" —Address BILL FRIED, 1139 Blake Avenue Brooklyn, New York.

RIDER, STANLEY F. Stationed at Ft. Williams, Maine, in 1924-25 with Service Co. 5th Infantry. Any information will be appreciated.—Address C. H. UNDERWOOD, 2 M. C. Ditch, Army Base, Boston, Mass.

WINDROSS, RAYMOND H. Information will be held confidential. Last heard of in Portland, Me., Chicago, Ill. Typewriter repairman. Dark, with dark hair and eyes; clear-cut features.—Address C. H. UNDERWOOD, Army Base, Boston, Mass.

PECK, LEWIS M. About thirty-five; hair straight and dark; is powerfully built but has a somewhat stooped carriage; linguist—speaks the Mongolian and Cantonese dialects fluently; occupation, mason and builder. Last heard of in Kobe, Japan; engaged in rehabilitation after the earthquake three years ago. Frequents resorts of Cuba and Florida and has, I believe, a residence in Jacksonville. Information of his whereabouts would be deeply appreciated.—ADDRESS ERWIN CREWE ROSENAU, 775 Carolina Street, Gary, Indiana.

O'BRIEN, CLAUDE FRANCIS. Any one of his relatives or any one knowing him or his family, please communicate in regards to grave importance. Was also known as James O'Brien.—Write A. L. GAGNON, 3406 N. Broadway, Los Angeles, California.

LANGHAAR, JACK. Last heard from at Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1921. Was with me at New Wilson Island, Oklahoma, 1920-21. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by E. C. HOLLINGSWORTH, care of Tropical Oil Co., Cartagena, Colombia, S. A.

Be sure to let us know when you have found the friend or relative for whom you are inquiring.

WILLIAMS, JAMES. About 15 years old. Left home two years ago. Has first joint of his middle finger, left hand, missing. All are greatly worried and would like to hear from him. Write to your sister, Mrs. J. F. Pittitt, Sheffield, Alabama.—Address ROBERT WILLIAMS, General Delivery, Elk Horn, Wisconsin.

DETTMERHING, ERNEST. If you see this please write me at once. Mother needs you.—Address ROY DETTMERHING, Gen. Del., Nashville, Tenn.

JAMISON, HILL. Last heard from in Miami, Florida. Communicate with your mother at once.—Address MRS. F. H. JAMISON, 317 Rosemary Lane, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Be sure to let us know when you have found the friend or relative for whom you are inquiring.

PETERSON (son). Your father and mother know you are alive and hope you will see this note and know hereby, that we feel sure you did the right thing, and hope to have arrangements made by fall so you will have no occasion to go back to your past. You owe nothing. Watch *Adventure* for further notice.—L. P. Peterson, Magna, Utah.

CARNEY, VINCENT. Won't you please come home? I have had to put the children away and they are all over. Please if you read this come home for the children's sake as they ask for you. Your wife.—Ella.

VAN HOUTEN, LYNN, C. Would like to get in touch with him. Last saw him in Bannf, Canada, 1919. —Write Rex Leslie, 25 Trinity Place, Portland, Oregon.

EVANS, LLEWELYN, Ex-Trumpeter R. N. W. M. Police at Macleod, Alta. Would like to get in touch with him again. Last heard of in Edmonton, Alta.—Write Rex Leslie, Ex-Trumpeter. 25 Trinity Place, Portland, Oregon.

"JACK." We need you. Let me hear from you. Am having trouble.—Address May Delazarra, 1516 Terry Street, Houston, Texas.

Be sure to let us know when you have found the friend or relative for whom you are inquiring.

SMITHETT or RODERMAN, WILLIAM MELVINE. Please write at once to Dr. G. A. Smithett, Box 283, Aransas Pass, Texas.

BERKOWITZ, MEYER. Last heard of in 1919. Twenty-two years old, gray eyes, light brown hair. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Miss Sarah Berkowitz, 2108 Holmes Avenue, Springfield, Ill.

DANIELS, CONLEY or CONN. Have great news for you. He is six ft., weight about 155 pounds, brown eyes, dark hair, long shaped head, quiet disposition. Information will be greatly appreciated.—Address Taylor R. Cecil, Box 561, Crewe, Virginia.

JACK, LOUIS N. Helen divorced and remarried. Mother greatly worried and would like to hear that you are all right.—George A. Jack, 110-112 W. Broad Street, Burlington, New Jersey.

FALDOWSKI, EDWARD. Mother, sister and brother want to get in touch with him. Former member of Marines at Portsmouth, N. H., discharged May 8, 1924, went to Brooklyn, N. Y. In 1918 lived at 151 Meserole Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y. The address of his mother in Poland is, Gudwik Faldowski, Wlodsimers, Wolynski, Post. Pol w Vielan.—Address A. Faldowski, care of Mascarel Hotel, 807 Summit Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

Be sure to let us know when you have found the friend or relative for whom you are inquiring.

BEN BROWN or BIG BEN. Will you please write to your cousin Grace as I have some papers I want to know about. Let me know through this magazine, where I can write to you.

RIVER, FRED. Born in Cedar Springs, Michigan, in 1872. Last heard of in 1898 in Louisiana working in lumber camp in woods for Whited and Whitless, Alden Bridge, La. Fred, please write to your Mother.—Address Mrs. River, Belding, Michigan.

LANGSHAW, ROBERT HENRY. Age 27. Last heard of on U. S. S. *Texas* in 1919 at San Diego. Dark straight hair, four upper teeth missing, scar in front of head in hair, member of Knights of Pythias and Pat. Sons of Am. Had a brother and sister, Fern. Bob, if you are alive write at once to me. Strong friends can help no matter what. Important news.—Sister Fern, Brookdale Farm, Greenville, Delaware.

The following have been inquired for in either the Oct. 8th, 1926 or Oct. 23, 1926 issues of ADVENTURE. They can get the names and addresses of the inquirer from this magazine.

APPEL, MATT, J.; Calvert, Earle; Cooke, William; Coonstack, Percy James; Gideon, James; Gillmore, James H.; Hausner, Stanlius; Henderson, Alpha Lloyd; Holsall, Harry; Jensen, Sinar; Korte, W. F.; Landry, James Edward; Locke, Arthur; MacDonald, Bill; Mann, G. B.; Nicoll, John L.; O'Farrel, W. W.; Old Timers of days of Empire in Philippines on Panay; O'Roke, John; Ovenden, Mrs. Dorothy Cornish; Parce, Fremont A.; Parker, Lenniel Ernest; Parkhurst, Guy; Rowbotham, Cyril K.; John; Seeger, Adolf; Seeley, James Howey; Sharp, John Rueben; Skerratt, Fred; Taylor, Edward; Vincent, Donald; Ward, Richard (Dick).

Camp-Fire Buttons—To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: *Adventure* from 1919 to 1925, incomplete, totalling 112 issues, also November, 1918. What am I offered for the lot?—Address, B. Doran, 3377 So. 17th Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

WILL SELL or EXCHANGE: Issues from 1920 to 1926, at 7c. each, plus postage. File incomplete, so will exchange.—Address, George J. Champion, 1761 E. 39th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

WILL SELL: *Adventure* complete for 1922. Thirty-six copies, 10c each plus postage.—Address, J. Pecaro, 505 W. 6th Street, St. Charles, Illinois.

FOR SALE: Complete file of *Adventure* from September 1, 1921, issue to date, 173 numbers. Best offer takes. F. o. b., Kansas City, Mo. Address, W. S. Gilmore, 3221 Park Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung—This department appears in alternate issues of the magazine.

Identification Cards—Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Butterick Publishing Company, *not* to any individual.

Forwarding Mail—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Verdicts by Adventure *as to the authoritativeness, reliability and authenticity of fact-material, local color and general soundness of current non-fiction*

BOOKS *you can* Believe

Given by Experts having first-hand Knowledge of the Material involved

IN THIS department we give our readers a service that is, we think, unique. There are thousands of book review columns, but, aside from those in technical publications, all are fundamentally alike. In "Books You Can Believe" judgment is not passed on literary quality. No books of fiction are reviewed. No one critic passes on all books—no, nor any dozen critics.

Our staff of reviewers numbers something like one hundred, each a specialist in a particular field, each known to us through his work as one of our "Ask Adventure" experts or through contributions to our magazine. Among them they cover the entire field of outdoor activities—exploration and travel of all kinds, the sea, foreign countries, hunting, fishing, games and sports, such sciences as anthropology and herpetology, everything in the outdoor and adventure field in its broadest sense.

Judgment is given solely on reliability. We answer for you the question "Is this book sound and authoritative in the fact material it presents—is it worth our reading or should we get our information from a more reliable source; can we trust it entirely or should its statements or point of view be discounted?" Its literary quality and even its surface interest are entirely secondary considerations. What our experts tell us is whether or not it is to be accepted as authority.

Books come to this office direct from the publishers and are sent by us to the experts in whose fields they fall. Books of little or no value will be reported as such to us but will be omitted from mention except in cases where a later popular vogue indicates the need of an authoritative verdict on their unreliability. Even the best of books will be covered in few words.

It is to be noted that most of our "Ask Adventure" experts have made out careful bibliographies on their respective fields, free to readers on request made direct to these experts, so that you can choose with assurance among old as well as new books. A stamped and addressed return envelope must accompany each request. Service is entirely free to all our readers.

This department appears only in alternate issues of the magazine.

THE GLAMOUR OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, by H. Glynn-Ward, Century.—Truly British Columbian. The author recognizes that the subject has sufficient interest and romance of its own, to need no addition or distortion. A valuable book for those in search of new fields for business or pleasure. As data for reference alone worth a place in any library. The description of the comparatively small portion of the Province of B. C. covered must cause the reader to wonder what the rest contains. True in fact and atmosphere and written with a genuine love of nature.—C. Plowden.

TRAIL CRAFT, by Claude P. Fordyce, Stewart Kidd Co., Cincinnati, O. 202 pages. 64,000 words. 29 plates (numerous details).—A practising medical surgeon, Dr. Fordyce has camped, tramped, toured and studied outdoor conditions, especially in western deserts and high altitudes. To experience he has added view-points and data from numerous personal and published sources. He covers clearly the fundamentals of camping, from going light on hikes to auto touring. His studies of tents and shelters are particularly helpful, including home-made equipment. He stresses proper food, quantities, and water. Remarks on health, medicines, injuries, pests (about 40 pages) important and authoritive. Belongs in every outdoor man's working library, especially western. Makes camera integral part of outfit.—Raymond S. Spears.

Older Books

All books below passed by Edgar Young.

TROPICAL AGRICULTURE, by Earley V. Wilcox, D. Appleton and Co., New York and London.—I have worn my copy out mailing it to friends.

MANUAL OF TROPICAL AND SUBTROPICAL FRUITS, by Wilson Popenoe, The MacMillan Co., New York.—An excellent work.

GYPSYING THROUGH CENTRAL AMERICA, by Eugene Cunningham, T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., Adelphi Terrace, London (1922).—A trip by horseback from San José, Costa Rica, north to Guatemala City. A first rate book by a first rate fellow.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *December 8th*

The Wolf Master

A Complete Novel

By Harold Lamb

The young *Kirdy*, now known as the *White Falcon*, is given the task of hunting down a traitor to the Cossack brotherhood. The chase carries him to Moscow, to the very feet of the throne, then across the steppes amid many dangers, to the city of the Golden Horde—and he does not travel alone.

East of the Bishop

By Richard Howells Watkins

The Scilly Isles, with their myriad rocky traps for even the experienced sailor, are no place to settle a ha'penny grudge—take *Rob Trevellick's* word for it.

A Night at San Asensio

By W. Townend

A fair-haired, courageous woman, a man who did not play the game, a lonely and embittered sea-captain, and a curious and romantic young engineer—all in a house of mystery on a hot still tropical night.

The Super of the Santee

By T. T. Flynn

Secure in his position was *Superintendent McGann*, but he made a mistake when he insulted *Paddy Reese*, fat, jolly, gray-haired—the best engineer on the Sky City-Petersburg run.

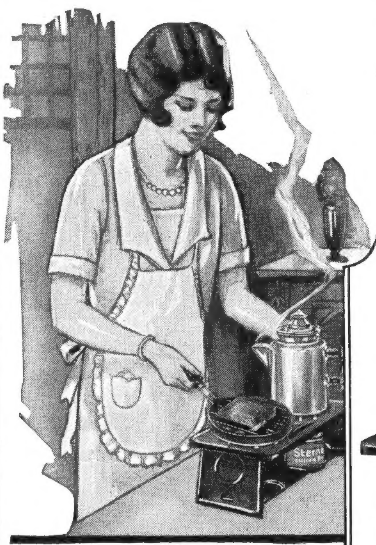
Also—*Other Good Stories*

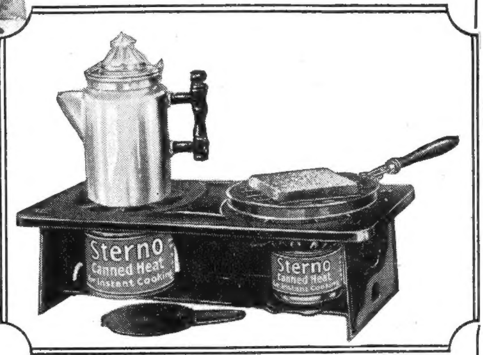
Dead Man's Luck, *superstition and a pair of pliers,* by Harry G. Huse; The Apostle, *that gun-twirl of Kid Bart's,* by John Webb; *Part Three of* The Way of Sinners, Francesco *takes the lead of the condottieri*, by F. R. Buckley; *Part Three of* Treasure, *in which the threat of the snake comes to pass,* by Gordon Young.

Adventure is out on the 8th and 23d of each month

In a Jiffy!

Piping Hot Breakfast Coffee And Crisp, Savory Toast—





Sterno Canned Heat for Instant Cooking
Sterno Canned Heat for Instant Cooking

with the Sterno Double Burner COOK STOVE

Introduced only a few months ago, the Sterno Double Burner Cook Stove so quickly proved its convenience for a hundred and one different uses, that now thousands on thousands of homes the country over enjoy its remarkable helpfulness.

Useful Day and Night

Quickly, conveniently, it prepares your morning toast and coffee—and that is only a start in its many uses. For heating baby's milk during the night—for the sick room, nursery, office—for the business girl in her room—for light ironing, hot water quick for shaving, soldering radio parts—for cooking or boiling scores of tempting dishes—wherever instantaneous heat is what you need—you can depend on handy, compact, Sterno Canned Heat, always ready, and trust the Sterno Double Burner Cook Stove—sturdy, efficient, reliable.

The new Sterno Double-Burner Cook Stove folds flat as a pancake for travelling use, sets up in a jiffy as a strong, substantial cooking outfit, and sells for only fifty cents—a most wonderful value. Made of double strength heavy gauge steel, it does practically all the ordinary kitchen stove can do—and beats it all hollow for convenience. Every home can afford it if only for the sake of emergency. Your home should have it. *Get it now and get the toaster free, as explained in the side column.*

ONLY
50c
AT YOUR DEALER

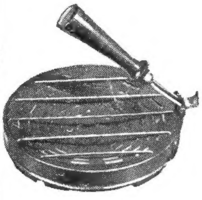
East of the Rocky Mountains	
Double Burner Cook Stove	50c
Small size Canned Heat	10c
Large size Canned Heat	25c
In the Far West	
Double Burner Cook Stove	50c
Small size Canned Heat, 2 for	25c
Large size Canned Heat	30c
In Canada	
Double Burner Cook Stove	75c
Small size Canned Heat	15c
Large size Canned Heat	35c

STERNO CANNED HEAT

THE CLEAN, CONVENIENT FUEL

Sterno is manufactured under U. S. Gov't Permit for use only as a fuel

Here is the Toaster You Can Get Free by Acting Now



Has a convenient folding handle—prepares delicious, crisp, brown toast quickly—no taste from fuel.

How to Get It

Go to your dealer and buy a Sterno Double Burner Cook Stove described on this page, and send us the guarantee slip you will find packed in the box, with your name and address, and toaster will be sent you.

If already a user of Sterno Canned Heat, send us five Sterno labels and we will send you the toaster free. If your dealer has not the 2-burner stove, send us 50c for the stove and the toaster will be sent with it. (Canada, 75c.)

STERNO CORP
Dept. 493
9 East 37th St.
New York City

I enclose (check one of the following):
- ☐ Guarantee slip or
- ☐ Five Sterno labels or
- ☐ 50c (Canada, 75c)

for double burner stove, to comply with your conditions for a free toaster.

*Name*________________

____

*Address*________________

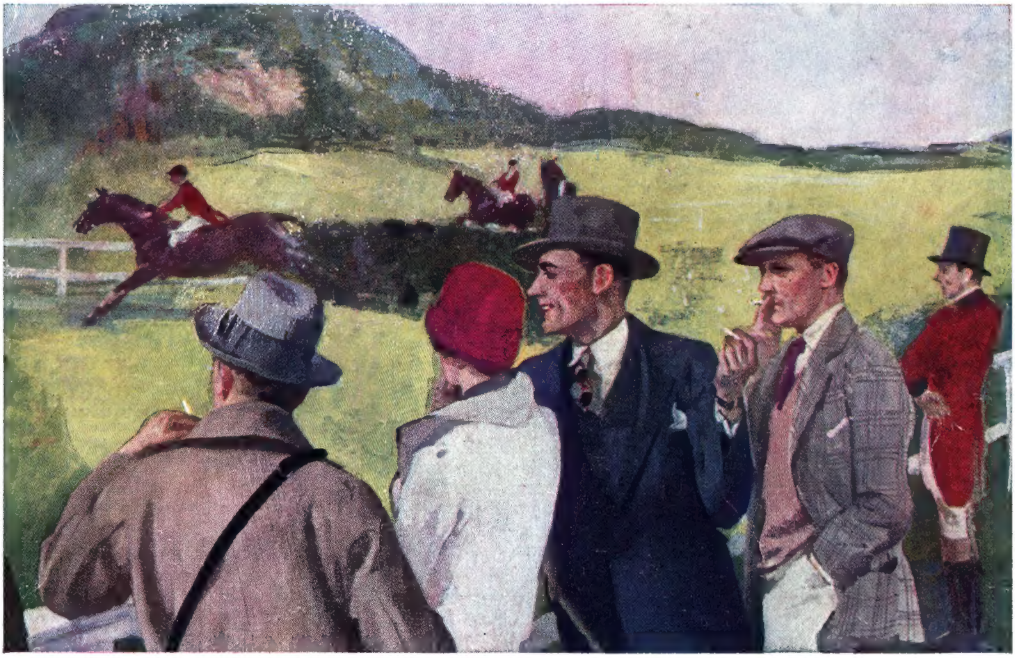
____

*City*________________

____

This offer expires Dec. 31, 1926

When it's hunters' day at the horse show—and the best jumpers in the land are soaring over the hedges —have a Camel!



No other cigarette in the world is like Camels. Camels contain the choicest Turkish and Domestic tobaccos. The Camel blend is the triumph of expert blenders. Even the Camel cigarette paper is the finest—made especially in France. Into this one brand of cigarettes is concentrated the experience and skill of the largest tobacco organization in the world.

CAMEL
TURKISH & DOMESTIC
BLEND
CIGARETTES

Our highest wish, if you do not yet know Camel quality, is that you try them. We invite you to compare Camels with any other cigarette made at any price.

R. J. Reynolds Tobacco
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Winston-Salem, N. C.

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